

# **Against Domestication**

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1973

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The time we are now living through is without doubt the most critical period capitalist society has ever known. All the features which we associate with the classic crisis now exist as a permanent state of affairs, though production itself has not been affected, except to a limited extent in certain countries. Social relations and traditional consciousness are decomposing all around us, while at the same time each institution in society proceeds to ensure its survival by recuperating the movement which opposes it. (An obvious example here is the catholic church, which has lost count of all the “modernizations” it has embraced). One would think that the violence and torture which is now endemic everywhere would have people mobilized and up in arms against it, but instead it continues to flourish on a world scale. Indeed, the situation today makes the “barbarism” of the Nazis seem in comparison rather unprofessional, quite archaic in fact. All the conditions would seem to be ripe; there should be revolution. Why then is there such restraint? What is to stop people from transforming all these crises and disasters, which are themselves the result of the latest mutation of capital, into a catastrophe for capital itself?

The explanation for this is to be found in the domestication of humanity, which comes about when capital constitutes itself as a human community. The process starts out with the fragmentation and destruction of human beings, who are then restructured in the image of capital; people are turned into capitalist beings, and the final outcome is that capital is anthropomorphised. The domestication of humanity is closely bound up with another phenomenon which has intensified even further the passivity of human beings: capital has in effect “escaped”. Economic processes are out of control and those who are in a position to influence them now realize that in the face of this they are powerless: they have been completely outmanoeuvred. At the global level, capital’s escape is evident in the monetary crisis;<sup>1</sup> overpopulation, pollution and the exhaustion of natural resources. The domestication of humanity and the escape of capital are concepts which can explain the mentality and activity of those who claim to be revolutionaries and believe that they can intervene to hasten the onset of revolution: the fact is that they are playing roles which are a part of the old world. The revolution always eludes them and when there is any kind of upheaval they see it as something external to them, which they have to chase after in order to be acknowledged as “revolutionaries”.

For a considerable time, human beings have, strictly speaking, been outstripped by the movement of capital which they are no longer able to control. This explains why some people think that the only solution is flight into the past, as with the fashionable preoccupation with mysticism, zen, yoga and tantraism in the U.S. Others would rather take refuge in the old myths which reject the total and all-pervading tyranny of science and technology. (Often this is all combined with the use of some drug which gives the illusion of the rapid arrival of a world different from the horror we are now living through.<sup>2</sup>) On the other hand, there are people who say that only science and technology can be relied upon to provide the answers — which would explain why certain women in the feminist movement are able to envisage their emancipation through parthenogenesis or by the production of babies in incubators.<sup>3</sup> There are others who believe they

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<sup>1</sup> What we call the monetary crisis involves more than just determining the price of gold or redefining its role; nor is it merely a question of establishing a new general equivalent (a new standard altogether), or setting fixed parities among national currencies, or integrating the economies of the money markets (capital as totality — Marx). The monetary crisis is about the role of capital in its money form, or, more precisely, the superseding of the money form itself, just as there has been a supercession of the commodity form.

<sup>2</sup> Worse than the “heartless world” Marx speaks of in *The Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*.

<sup>3</sup> The presupposition underlying such an absurd demand is the supposed biological inferiority of women, which

can fight against violence by putting forward remedies against aggressiveness, and so on. These people all subscribe, in a general way, to the proposition that each problem presupposes its own particular scientific solution. They are therefore essentially passive, since they take the view that the human being is a simple object to be manipulated. They are also completely unequipped to create new interhuman relationships (which is something they have in common with the adversaries of science); they are unable to see that a scientific solution is a capitalist solution, because it eliminates humans and lays open the prospect of a totally controlled society.<sup>4</sup>

We now come to the category of people who feel that they have to “do something”: they are now having to realize that their understanding of the situation is totally inadequate, and their efforts to conceal this fact only makes their powerlessness more obvious. The “silent majority”, who make up the rest, are permeated with the belief that it is pointless to do anything, because they simply have no perspective. Their silence is not consent pure and simple, but rather evidence of their incapacity to intervene in any way. The proof of this is that when they are mobilized, it is never for something but against it. Their particular passivity is therefore negative.

It is important to note that the two groups referred to above — the activists and the silent majority — cannot be catalogued simply as left and right: the old political dichotomy no longer operates here. The confusion which this raises is nevertheless important in relation to the attitude taken towards science, since in the past it was people on the left who were very committed to science, whereas now it is being condemned by the New Left (in the United States for example). The leftright dichotomy lives on, however, among the old regroupements, the parties of the left and right and all the rackets of the past, but these oppositions have all ceased to matter: in one way or another they each defend capital equally. The most active of all are the various communist parties because they defend capital by espousing exactly the same scientific forms and rational structures which capital uses to maintain itself.

All the movements of the left and right are functionally the same in as much as they all participate in a larger, more general movement towards the destruction of the human species. Whether people stay confined within certain obsolete strategies and forms, or whether they submit to the mechanisms of technology — either way the result is the same. Historically, the categories of left and right seem to emerge as a duality at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the capitalist mode of production was beginning to exert its real domination over the process of production, and was becoming a true social force. Thus certain people like Carlyle found themselves in opposition to the apologists of capital,<sup>5</sup> but it was left to Marx to go further: he affirmed the necessity of developing productive forces (and therefore science and technology as well), and at the

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is a scientific illusion. Science has discovered a defect in women and decrees that it is up to science to remedy it. If men are no longer needed (because of parthenogenesis) and if women aren't needed either (since embryos and even ovaries may be developed in phials), then we are left with the question of whether there is any need for the human species after all. Has it not become redundant? These people seem to believe in solving everything by mutilation. Why not do away with pain by eliminating the organs of sensitivity? Social and human problems cannot be solved by science and technology. Their only effect when used is to render humanity even more superfluous. Obviously, no one can make a judgement about the feminist movement as a whole just by reference to that aspect now being discussed. The feminist movement is of great importance in the struggle against capital, and it is a subject we hope to take up on in the future. In its critique of capitalist society and the traditional revolutionary movement, it has made a remarkable contribution..

<sup>4</sup> In the original French the author frequently uses the expressions “men”, “man”, or “mankind”, as well as “humans”, or “human beings”. Where the false generic “man” etc. does occur it has been changed, even though this must involve a distortion of what was originally intended. [translator's note]

<sup>5</sup> The struggle of people against capital has only ever been seen through the narrow focus of class. The only way to be regarded as a real adversary of capital has been to actively identify oneself with the proletariat; all else

same time denounced their negative effects on people in the immediate situation. But he thought that all this would eventually lead to a contradiction such that the development of productive forces would no longer be possible without the destruction of the capitalist mode of production. Thereafter these forces would be directed by people themselves, and alienation would cease to exist. But this was to presuppose that capital would not be able to become truly autonomous, that it could not escape from the constraints of the social and economic base on which it is built: the law of value, the exchange of capital and labour power, the rigorous general equivalent (gold), and so on.

By simply having interiorized the social base on which it is built, capital has become autonomous, from which point it has then been able to make its escape. The headlong plunge of its development over a number of years has now let loose grave dangers for humanity and for the whole of nature. Not even the keen-witted experts and the droning old bores can remain aloof any longer from the dangers that now confront us. To a certain degree, they are even obliged to join in the company of those who talk in terms of an apocalyptic future. The apocalypse is fashionable because our world is nearing its end, a world in which human beings, in spite of all the evidence of their weakness and degradation, had always remained the norm, the reference point of the world. But having been presented with the fact that God is dead, we now hear the proclamation of the death of the human being. Both God and humans yield in turn to science, which is at once the goddess and servant of capital: science presents itself in today's world as the study of mechanisms of adaptation which will assimilate human beings and nature into the structure of capital's productive activity. All the signs indicate that it is those who are least destroyed as people, and particularly young people, who now find themselves unable to accept this onslaught of adaptation and domestication; hence they are impelled to refuse the system.

The process of domestication is sometimes brought about violently, as happens with primitive accumulation; more often it proceeds insidiously because revolutionaries continue to think according to assumptions which are implicit in capital and the development of productive forces, and all of them share in exalting the one divinity, science. Hence domestication and repressive consciousness have left our minds fossilized more or less to the point of senility; our actions have

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is romantic, petit bourgeois etc ... But the very act of reasoning in classist terms means that any particular class is confined within the limits of class analysis. This is particularly important when one considers that the working class has as its mission the elimination of all classes. It also avoids the question of how that class will bring about its own autodestruction, since this classist analysis prevents any lessons being drawn from the tragic intellectual fate of those people who set themselves in opposition to capital without even recognising or identifying their enemy (as with Bergson, for example). Today, when the whole classist approach has been deprived of any solid base, it may be worthwhile to reconsider movements of the right and their thinking. The right is a movement of opposition to capital that seeks to restore a moment which is firmly rooted in the past. Hence in order to eliminate class conflict, the excesses of capitalist individualism, speculation and so on, the Action Francaise and the Nouvelle Action Francaise (NAF) envisage a community which can only be guaranteed, according to them, by a system of monarchy. (See particularly the chapter on capitalism in *Les Dossiers de l'Action Francaise*).

It seems that every current or group which opposes capital is nonetheless obliged to focus always on the human as the basis of everything. It takes diverse forms, but it has a profoundly consistent basis and is surprisingly uniform wherever human populations are found. Thus by seeking to restore (and install) the *volksgemeinschaft*, even the Nazis represent an attempt to create such a community (cf. also their ideology of the *Urmensch*, the "original man"). We believe that the phenomenon of Nazism is widely misunderstood: it is seen by many people only as a demonic expression of totalitarianism. But the Nazis in Germany had reintroduced an old theme originally theorized by German sociologists like Tonnies and Max Weber. And so in response, we find the Frankfurt school, and most notably Adorno, dealing in empty and sterile concepts of "democracy", due to their incapacity to understand the phenomenon of Nazism. They have been unable to grasp Marx's great insight, which was that he posed the necessity of reforming

become rigidified and our thoughts stereotyped. We have been the soulless frozen masses fixated on the post, believing all the time that we were gazing ahead into the future. But at the time of May/June '68, a new life erupted and the movement of growth towards communism was taken up again. No new theory was produced, nor did any new modes of action appear. The important fact was that the struggle had a new aim. It had nothing to do with politics, ideology, science or even social science (the latter having been totally discredited). Rather, it was a specific and vital need asserted against this society and independently of it: to end the passivity imposed by capital, to rediscover communication between people and to unleash free creativity and unrestrained imagination in a movement of human becoming.

## The Mythology of the Proletariat

With the advent of May/June '68 everything changed and everything has kept on changing ever since. This is why it is not possible to understand the lyc  e insurrection of 1973 (discussed below) and its possible potential except in relation to this earlier movement.

According to our analysis of it, the activity of May/June '68 was clear evidence that revolution had positively re-emerged, signifying the beginning of a new revolutionary cycle. But our argument here proceeded according to a classist analysis: thus we went on to declare that the May movement would result in the proletariat being recalled to its class base. More than this, we found in the events of that period confirmation of our belief that the revolution would follow a course of development along lines laid down by Marx. But in point of fact, the first classes to rise up in 1968 were the social strata closest to the established society, made up of people whose objective interests were closely aligned with those of the state. The oppressed classes followed on later, and it was they who radically resolved the contradictions that the other social strata wanted only to reform. Now the course of development followed by the English and French revolutions provided the underlying substance from which Marx's thought was moulded. Thus in the case of the French revolution, the nobility intervened in the situation in the very early stages, this being the famous nobles' revolt which took place some years before 1789, which picked up and aided the struggle of the bourgeoisie (at the same time preparing the way for enlightened despotism). There then followed the bourgeois strata less tied to the state, which formed, as Kautsky remarked, a kind of intelligentsia. Only then, with the failure of reform, the internal collapse of the system and the fall of the monarchy, were the peasants and artisans drawn in (the fourth estate, the future proletariat), and it was they who created the final decisive break and ensured that there would be no turning back. Without them, the revolution, in as much as it involved a change in the mode of production, would have taken much longer. In Russia there was similar pattern of development. The suggestion here is that those who are most oppressed and have the greatest objective interest in rebelling — and who form, according to some, the true revolutionary class — can only in fact bring themselves into movement during a period when there has already

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the community, and that he recognised that this reformation must involve the whole of humanity. The problems are there for everybody; they are serious, and they urgently require solutions. People try to work them out from diverse political angles. However, it is not these problems which determine what is revolutionary or counter-revolutionary, but the solutions put forward — i.e. are they effective or not? And here the racketeer's mentality descends upon us once again: each gang of the left or the right carves out its own intellectual territory; anyone straying into one or the other of these territories is automatically branded as a member of the relevant controlling gang. Thus we have reification: the object is determinant, the subject passive.

been a rupture at the core of society, and the state has been considerably weakened. Out of the turmoil there begins to emerge a new perspective, if only through the realization that life is not going to continue as before, that it has become necessary to find some other way. This process is one of those elements that gives every revolution a character that is not strictly classist. It will be more accentuated in the case of the communist revolution, because it won't be the activity of one class only, but of humanity rising up against capital.

At the centre of what we at one time ventured to call the universal class, or more simply humanity (for both are now the slaves of capital), there are social strata which exist in very close affinity with capital, (i.e. the new middle classes and the students) who are rebelling against the system. They see themselves as distinct strata in society to the extent that they claim to be able to detonate a movement which will revolutionize the proletariat and set it in motion — but this is just a caricature of revolution, dragged out for the occasion dressed up in all its old regalia awkwardly going through the same old motions.

The classist analysis which we adopted originally could never do more than interpret real events. The same shortcoming affected the participants of May '68 and made it possible for them to perceive themselves according to the old schemas. It is becoming increasingly obvious that these active participants were men and women who were personally and very intimately involved in the life and functioning of capital, and more especially were having to justify and maintain its representation,<sup>6</sup> who then went into revolt against it. But their revolt is completely recuperable as long as it moves on the worn out road of class struggle which aspires to awaken the proletariat and make it accomplish its mission.

Here we meet a clear impasse. The role of the proletariat has been to destroy the capitalist mode of production in order to liberate the productive forces imprisoned within it: communism was to begin only after this action was accomplished. But far from imprisoning the productive forces, capitalism raises them to new heights, because they exist for the benefit of capital, not humanity. The proletariat therefore, is superfluous. The reversal referred to just now, whereby the productive forces are liberated by capital, rather than by the proletariat, which has been made possible thanks to the development of science, is a development in parallel with the domestication of human beings. Their domestication is their acceptance of the development of capital as theorized by Marxism, which is itself the arch-defender of the growth of productive forces. In the course of this development, the proletariat as producer of surplus value has been denied even this function by the generalization of wage labour and the destruction of any possible distinction between productive and unproductive work. The once revered proletariat has now become the strongest upholder of the capitalist mode of production. What does the proletariat want? And those who speak in the name of the proletariat and happily venerate its name — what do they want? If it is full employment and self-management, this would only ensure the permanent continuity of the capitalist mode of production since it has now become humanized. The left all believe that the process of production, being rationality in action, only needs to be made to function for human needs. But this rationality is capital itself.

The mythology of the proletariat accounts for how the “populism” of May '68, as we called it, became “proletarianism”. People started to say: “We must go to the proletariat, revive its fighting spirit, summon up its capacities for self-sacrifice and then it can kick out the evil bosses and follow the other ‘proletarians’ down the road to revolution.”

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<sup>6</sup> We are speaking here of technicians, intellectuals, politicians and economists, like the members of the Club of

May '68 ushered in a period of great scorn and confusion. People were scornful of themselves because they weren't "proletarian", and they scorned each other for the same reason, whereas they were all confused about the proletariat, the class that had always been considered potentially revolutionary. There is no other way to explain the impasse encountered by the movement which formed itself in opposition to the established society. This impasse did not however become clear all at once, because in the enthusiasm which followed May '68 the movement of opposition took on a certain life of its own, and the essential questions were allowed to remain on the sidelines. But not only this, the shock of May '68 caused a revival and a re-emergence of the currents of the workers movement which had up to then been held in great disdain by the established parties and consigned to oblivion: the council movement in all its variants, the old German Communist Workers Party (KAPD), the ideas of individuals like Lukacs and Korsch, and so on. This resurrection of the past was a sign that people had not grasped directly the reality of the situation, and that the situation itself was unable to engender new forms of struggle and other theoretical approaches. Nevertheless, to intellectually retrace that path already so well travelled is even still a form of revolt, because it won't bow to the tyranny of what has simply "happened". It can moreover be a starting point in finding out about the origins of the wandering of humanity, and a first step in confronting humanity's fate which is to have been excluded from its own human context and condemned to the productivist sewer.

We were speaking earlier of an "impasse". As an image it is not as suggestive as we would like, but it is nevertheless the heart of the matter. It is like a wall which stands in front of all the different groups of this vast current in society, and this wall is the proletariat and its representation.<sup>7</sup> Militants go from one group to another, and as they do so they "change" ideology, dragging with them each time the same load of intransigence and sectarianism. A few of them manage, extremely large trajectories, going from Leninism to situationism, to rediscover neo-bolshevism and then passing to councilism. They all come up against this wall and are thrown back further in some cases than in others. The wall is an effective barrier against any possible theoretical and practical combination. (In Germany you can even come across antiauthoritarian trotskyists, Korschist trotskyists, etc.)

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Rome, Mansholt, Dumont, Laborit etc.

<sup>7</sup> Human beings are not constantly immersed in nature; existence is not always at one with essence, nor being with consciousness, and so on. This separation brings into being the need for representation. Once time is perceived as irreversible, the subject of the past is seen as distinct from the subject of the present, and thus memory begins to assume a determining role. It is here that representation interposes itself in order to provide a mediation. From such an understanding, the way is open to a re-examination of philosophy and science, a task which will have to be undertaken someday. Perhaps some readers may have been drawn to similar ideas (which are actually different because they leave aside the importance of representation in social contexts) in the work of Cardan and the social-imaginary, the situationists and the spectacle, and in the area of scholarship, Foucault's analysis of representation in the sixteenth century (which we took up in a study of the democratic mystification). We would like to clarify our own position on this: we employ the term "representation" in the same way as Marx did (*vorstellung*) in order to indicate, for example, that value must be represented in a price. In "A propos du capital" (*Invariance* ser. III, no. 1), we discussed very briefly the way capital becomes representation, which then becomes autonomous, and how it can then only exist through being accepted and recognized by everyone as real. This is why people have now had to interiorize the representation of capital. This whole question of representation is a very important one. From the moment when human beings and nature no longer exist together in an immediate unity (leaving aside for the moment the question of whether an "immediate unity" could ever have been possible), representation becomes necessary. Representation is the human appropriation of reality and our means of communication, and in this sense it can never be abolished: human beings cannot exist in an undifferentiated union with nature. The point is that representation must not be allowed to become autonomous, another expression of alienation.



Admittedly, within these groups, just as with certain individuals, there are aspects which are far from negative, since a certain number of things have been properly understood; but even this understanding is deformed by the jack-of-all-trades mentality which is the spiritual complement of coming together in a groupscule.

In previous articles<sup>8</sup> it has been clearly shown that it is not possible to find the key to the representation of the proletariat without first calling into question the Marxist conception of the development of the productive forces, the law of value, and so on. Yet the proletariat is made into a fetish, and because it raises such strong ethical and practical implications, it is still the one element which weighs most heavily on the consciousness of revolutionaries. But once this fetish is challenged and seen for what it is, then the whole theoretical/ ideological edifice just collapses in confusion. And yet there still seems to be this unspoken assumption that each individual must be attached to a group and be identified as a part of it in order to have the security and strength to face the enemy. There is the fear of being alone — accompanied nonetheless by a genuine realization that it is necessary to join together to destroy capitalism — but there is also the fear of individuality,<sup>9</sup> an inability to confront in an autonomous way the fundamental questions of our period. It is another manifestation of the domestication of human beings suffering from the disease of dependency.

## The Lycée Movement, Paris, 1973

Following on this, the real importance of the lycée movement (Spring, 1973) can be better appreciated. It brought into clear perspective something that had only been seen in outline in May'68: the critique of repressive consciousness. Repressive consciousness originated with Marxism in so far as the latter is a concrete formula for the future of the human species: proletarian revolution was supposed to come about when the development of the productive forces allowed it. This legalistic and repressive consciousness operates by explaining away popular uprisings, branding them as premature, petit-bourgeois, the work of irresponsible elements, etc. It is a consciousness which goes to the roots of reification, because it can only be organized consciousness, taking the form of parties, unions and groupuscles. Each of them organizes repression against those who are not organized, or who are not organized according to their particular methods. The difference between these organizations is measured by the amount of repression they are prepared to exercise.

Now the critique of repressive consciousness does not attack the myth of the proletariat directly by arguing over it, but rather more indirectly, by ignoring it and treating it with derision. The young people on this occasion didn't fall into the trap of looking to workerist organizations

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<sup>8</sup> See the chapter "Growth of Productive Forces: Domestication of Human Beings" in Camatte: *The Wandering of Humanity* (Detroit, 1975). That work also contains a more detailed discussion of other matters raised in the present article, e.g. the Marxist theory of the proletariat, repressive consciousness etc. [translator's note]

<sup>9</sup> This point was made clear by Norman O. Brown in *Eros and Thanatos*. The fear of individuality cannot by itself adequately explain the profound phenomenon whereby human beings are pressed into a mould, obliged to identify themselves as a certain type of being and forced to submerge themselves within a group. People are afraid of themselves because they don't know themselves. Hence there is this need for a norm in order to be able to ward off the "excesses" which can afflict the social order as well as the individual heart. It would seem that the organizations within society are too fragile to allow the free development of human potentialities. With the capitalist mode of production everything is possible as an element of capitalization, but what is possible is all the time only what is permitted; this means that the individual is reduced to a modality of being that is either normal or abnormal; the totality meanwhile

in order to form a unified front in the style of May '68. But politicians of all kinds went after them trying to get them "involved": the PCF, PS, PSU, CGT, CFDT<sup>10</sup> and the rest went chasing after high school kids trying to persuade them that they were all somehow under the same banner. When the students broke away from the unitary demonstrations, as they very often did, out came the political masquerade obscenely offering itself for sale: the veteran political hacks and the hardened old temptresses of the PCF and the CCT, discovering five years after May '68 the political importance of youth, marching along demanding deferment for everyone, while the students looked on and jeered. It seemed almost as though the young people had been spirited off and their places taken by their elders !

More ridicule was in store for the politicians of every variety who affirmed once again during these events the primacy of the proletariat, declaring that the critical revolutionary moment was to be occasioned by a strike of skilled workers. This is because they can't conceive of revolution unless it appears dressed in overalls. Skilled workers do not threaten the capitalist system; the capitalist mode of production has long since accepted rises in wages, and as for working conditions, capital is well qualified to improve them. Thus the abolition of assembly line work is a well recognized necessity in some bosses' circles.

The lycée movement belittled the institutions of society and their defenders. Those who wanted (albeit reluctantly) to bring themselves down to the level of "our valiant youngsters" behaved ridiculously — after all, recuperation has to pay its price. On the other hand, those who wanted to counter the movement from within and didn't succeed, just proceeded to despise it, and in this manner they brought down a similar ridicule on themselves. But then it was the turn of the men of government: out they came, bleating about how we've already got deputies and a parliament and that we should make use of them to sort out the problems that remain unsolved. The young people acted as though none of this existed. Once again, as in May '68, there was no communication, no understanding between the two sides ("We're not closed to arguments, but really I don't know what it is they want" — Fontanet, the Education minister). They fondly imagine that young people want to discuss with them and present opposing arguments. This is a revolution of life itself,<sup>11</sup> a search for another way of living. Dialogue should be concerned only

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exists only within the discourse of capital, where it remains perverted and beyond reach. The fear of individuality comes through very clearly in most of the utopias which depict the triumph of a despotic and egalitarian rationality.

<sup>10</sup> The abbreviations refer to the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, the United Socialist Party and the two big labour confederations: CGT (Communist) and the CFDT ("independent" left). The agitation in the lycées emerged openly on 22 March when 30,000 young people demonstrated in Paris against the Debré law which provided for 15 months military service (previously two years) for all 18 year olds, but with no deferment beyond the age of 21. During the first part of April there were more large demonstrations in Paris (one of them numbering 100,000 according to The Times, 10 Apr 73) and in many other cities in France and also Strasbourg. Strike Committees were formed in the lycées and general assemblies were set up. These were often controlled by political militants (usually belonging to the trotskyist organizations, La Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire and L'Alliance Marxiste; the young Communists stayed with the existing student organisations), and these leaders succeeded, against some considerable opposition, in forging contacts with the trade unions which had earlier issued long declarations of support for the striking lycéens. This led to the "unitary" demonstrations of 9 April where leaders of the CGT etc. marched at the head of the columns. [translator's note]

<sup>11</sup> In 1964 Cardan saw that youth insurrections were very important, but he viewed them as something exterior which had to be made use of. This is the tribute which ideology pays to the old idea of consciousness coming from outside: "The revolutionary movement will be able to give a positive direction to today's enormous youth revolt. If it can discover that new and true language which the youth is looking for, it can turn their revolt into a ferment of social transformation, and show them another activity for their struggle against the world which they now refuse." *Socialisme ou Barbarie* No. 35, p. 35

with the plans and ideas for realizing this desire. No dialogue can take place between the social order and those who are to overthrow it. If dialogue is still seen as a possibility, then this would be an indication that the movement is faltering.

Underlying all this is a profoundly important phenomenon: all human life, from the very beginning of its development within capitalist society, has undergone an impoverishment. More than this, capitalist society is death organized with all the appearances of life. Here it is not a question of death as the extinction of life, but death-in-life, death with all the substance and power of life. The human being is dead and is no more than a ritual of capital. Young people still have the strength to refuse this death; they are able to rebel against domestication. They demand to live. But to those great numbers of smugly complacent people, who live on empty dreams and fantasies, this demand, this passionate need just seems irrational, or, at best, a paradise which is by definition inaccessible.

Youth remains a serious problem for capital because it is a part of society which is still undomesticated. The lycée students demonstrated not only against military service and the army, but also, and just as much, against the school, the university and the family. Schools function as the organization of the passivity of the soul, and this is true even when active and libertarian methods are used; the liberation of the school would be the liberation of oppression. In the name of history, science and philosophy, each individual is sent down a corridor of passivity, into a world surrounded by walls. Knowledge and theory are just so many insurmountable barriers which prevent one individual from recognizing other individuals, making dialogue between them impossible. Discourse must proceed along certain channels, but that's all. And then at the end of the pipeline, there is the army, which is a factory for domestication; it organizes people into a general will to kill others, structuring the dichotomy already imprinted in their minds by the secular morality of "my nation" and "other people", all of whom are potential enemies. People are trained and educated to know how to justify the unjustifiable — the killing of men and women.

We do not deny that this agitation before Easter had largely reformist tendencies. The reformist aspects were what attracted recuperation, but that is not what interests us here because it tells us nothing about the real movement of struggle of the species against capital. As with May '68, this movement was superficial, (though only a more radical agitation from beneath could have raised it to the surface in the first place), and it will open the door to an improved restructuring of the despotism of capital, enabling it better to realize its own "modernization".

## The Despotism of Capital

Schools and universities are structures that are too rigid for the global process of capital, and the same thing holds true for the army.<sup>12</sup> The rapid decline of knowledge and the development of mass media have destroyed the old school system. Teachers and professors are, from the point of view of capital, useless beings who will tend to be eliminated in favour of programmed lessons

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<sup>12</sup> On the subject of the army, we would insist that those arguments which attempt to distinguish between the volunteer, professional army and the conscript or national army are a fraud, an absurd blackmail. If you end military service, you are still left with a professional army, a praetorian guard and the possibility of a fascist revival. (Certain leftist groups "intervened" during the agitation in 1973 demanding democratic and popular control of the national army [translators note]). In practice, the present system in France is a mixture: a professional army which educates and trains the intake who then go to make up the national army. And where did this national army, much vaunted

and teaching machines. (In just the same way, capital tends to eliminate the bureaucracy because it inhibits the transmission of information which is the very basis of capital's mobility.) It is ironic then that many people who argue for the necessity of life turn out to be readily convinced by solutions which entrust teaching to machines and thus eliminate human life. As a general rule, it may be said that all who embrace "modernization" are in fact provoking their own condemnation as individuals with a certain function in this society; they are demanding their own dispossession. But even those others who preach about the need to return to the rigid and authoritarian climate which prevailed before 1968 will not fare any better, because in order for their plans to succeed, they still have to depend on capital, and either way, left or right, capital profits equally.

Capital imposes its despotism on human beings by means of objects and things which are invested with new modes of being appropriate to capital's new requirements. It implies a world of things which are in rapid motion, constantly changing and differentiating themselves (a process which is clearly not unrelated to a feeling of meaninglessness). These qualities inevitably conflict with traditional social relations and previous ways of life, including previous ways of thinking. It is things which are the real subjects. They impose their own rhythm of life and ensure that people are confined to the level of their own single existences. But because objects and things are themselves governed and controlled by the movement of capital, there is always the possibility that this rising new oppression could actually set in motion an insurrectional movement against the society of capital itself. And yet capital in its turn is able to profit from subversion in order to consolidate itself, as it did during the early years of this century. The revolt of the proletariat, confined as it was to the terrain of the factory and emphasizing the ordering of production, was a factor which actually aided capital in its movement towards real domination. The end result was the elimination of strata that were unnecessary for the progress of capital, the triumph of full employment, the abandonment of laissez-faire liberalism, and so on.

We are not suggesting that revolution should rise directly out of the conflict we were speaking of just now, nor are we saying that the instigators of it will be men and women who are ordinarily very conservative. The point we want to emphasize is this: capital must come to dominate all human beings, and in order to do this it can no longer depend entirely for its support on the old social strata which are in turn coming under threat themselves. This is a tendency which Franz Borkenau understood very precisely:

in this tremendous contrast with previous revolutions, one fact is reflected. Before these latter years, counter-revolution usually depended on the support of reactionary powers which were technically and intellectually inferior to the forces of revolution. This has changed with the advent of fascism. Now, every revolution is likely to meet the attack of the most modern, most efficient, most ruthless machinery yet in existence. It means that the age of revolutions free to evolve according to their own laws is over.<sup>13</sup>

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by Jaurés come from? — the union sacrée of 1914, the sacred slaughter which is venerated to this day. There is a book called *l'Armée Nouvelle* (publisher 10/18) which demonstrates the extent to which "fascism" had no need to invent a fresh theory in this area, since one had already been provided by the social democratic International. Jaurés wanted to reconcile army and nation (which is exactly what Hitler wanted and managed to achieve.) The reconciliation was accomplished in 1914 when the brave Frenchmen gaily set out for the slaughter. How different it all was from Jaurés' cult of la patrie. "It was rooted in the very foundations of human life, and even, if we can put it this way, in people's physiology" (*l'Armée Nouvelle*, p.268). And in Germany, at about the same time, Bebel was thinking along similar lines.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Noam Chomsky: *American Power and the New Mandarins* (Pelican, 1969) p. 247.

We have got to remember that capital, as it constantly overthrows traditional patterns of life, is itself revolution. This should lead us to think again about the nature of revolution, and to realize that capital is able to take control of social forces in order to overthrow the established order in insurrections directed against the very society which it already dominates.<sup>14</sup> Never before have vision and understanding been more vitally necessary; every separate revolt now becomes a further stimulus for the movement of capital. But people have been robbed of their ability to think in a theoretical way and to perceive reality as part of the outcome of an historical process — this has happened as a result of the process of domestication. And in a similar way, this capacity for theoretical thought has been prevented from ever taking root in the material development of our planet and in us as a species due to the existence of a split between the mind and the body, and the old division between physical and intellectual work (which automated systems are now in the process of surmounting to capital's benefit).

Revolution can no longer be taken to mean just the destruction of all that is old and conservative, because capital has accomplished this itself. Rather, it will appear as a return to something (a revolution in the mathematical sense of the term), a return to community, though not in any form which has existed previously. Revolution will make itself felt in the destruction of all that which is most “modern” and “progressive” (because science is capital). Another of its manifestations will involve the reappropriation of all those aspects and qualities of life which have still managed to affirm that which is human. In attempting to grasp what this tendency means, we cannot be aided by any of the old dualistic, manichean categories. (It is the same tendency which in the past had held back the valorization process in its movement towards a situation of complete autonomy.) If the triumph of communism is to bring about the creation of humanity, then it requires that this creation be possible, it must be a desire which has been there all the time, for centuries. Yet here again nothing is easy, obvious, free from doubts, and indeed one could have legitimate doubts about what it means to be human after the experience of colonialism and Nazism, and then a second colonialism which strives to maintain itself in spite of revolts in the oppressed countries (notorious massacres and tortures having been committed by the British in Kenya, the French in Algeria and the Americans in Vietnam), and in the face of the brutal and deeprooted violence that everywhere continues to rage unchecked. Indeed, could it be that humanity is too lost and sunk in its infernal wandering to save itself?

## The Question of Violence

The movement which developed among the lycée students was an assertion of the communist revolution in its human dimension. The students took up the question of violence (though perhaps not in its full scope) in their refusal of the army, refusal of military service and refusal of the universal right to kill. By contrast, the groupuscules of the left and extreme left, but not the anarchists, preach about the necessity of learning to kill because they think they can make death “rebound” on capital. But none of them (and this is particularly true of the most extreme elements) ever take into account the fact that they are suggesting the necessity of destroying human beings

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<sup>14</sup> The Asiatic mode of production experienced quite a number of very extensive insurrectional movements which effectively regenerated it. According to a number of historians, some revolts were even raised up by the state itself. Mao's great cultural revolution is only a replay of such revolts. These facts confirm the thesis we have advanced many times before about the convergence between the Asiatic mode of production where classes could never become autonomous, and the capitalist mode where they are absorbed.

in order to accomplish this revolution. How can you celebrate a revolution with a rifle butt? To accept the army for one reason, whatever it may be, is to strengthen the oppressive structure at every level. Any kind of argument on this subject serves only to reinstate the despotism of repressive consciousness, according to which people must repress the desire to not kill because killing will be required of them at some stage in the future. (And indeed some people are known to actually rejoice in this prospect). Repressive consciousness forces me to be inhuman under the pretext that on a day decreed by some theoretical destiny, I will at last metamorphosize into a human being.

[The various left and extreme left currents] try to ensure that there is no convergence between the “bourgeois” desire to see military service abolished and the libertarian pacifism which underlies conscientious objection, something that is always more or less latent among the young. (T. Pfister, *Le Monde*, 27 Mar '73)

Violence is a fact of life in present day society; the question now is how that violence can be destroyed. Revolution unleashes violence, but it has to be under our control and direction; it cannot be allowed to operate blindly, and it certainly cannot be glorified and widened in its field of action. Statements like this may sound reasonable enough, but they aren't particularly helpful unless we go on to consider more precisely the actual nature of violence, which is determined in the first instance by its object: thus violence directed against the capitalist system should be praised and encouraged, but not violence against people. But the capitalist system is represented by people, and it is these people who will often be overtaken by violence. This is where the question of the limitation of violence becomes relevant; if it is not raised, we are still living according to the prescriptions of capital. Granted that capital's despotism is maintained through generalized violence against people, it is also a fact that it can only achieve this domination over people by first putting them in opposition to one another and then allotting them different roles. When conflicts occur, each side then represents the other as non-human (which is how the Americans saw the Vietnamese). If human beings are to be destroyed, they must first be despoiled of their humanity. And so if, during the revolutionary struggle people choose to proceed according to this view, are they not simply imitating the methods used by the capitalists, and thus furthering the destruction of human beings?

So we might ask what the leftists are playing at when they theorize about the destruction of the dominant class (rather than what supports it), or of the cops (“the only good cop is a dead one”)? One can make the equation CRS=SS<sup>15</sup> on the level of a slogan, because that accurately represents the reality of the two roles, but it does not justify the destruction of the people involved — for two reasons. Firstly, it effectively rules out the possibility of undermining the police force. When the police feel they are reduced to the status of sub-humans, they themselves go into a kind of revolt against the young people in order to affirm a humanity which is denied to them, and in so doing they are therefore not simply playing the part of killing/ repression machines. Secondly, every riot cop and every other kind of cop is still a person. Each one is a person with a definite role like everyone else. It is dangerous to delegate all inhumanity to one part of the social whole,

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<sup>15</sup> The CRS are the para-military riot police. In May 1979 a new variation on the old slogan appeared when the trotskyists of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) joined forces with the stalinists and the CRS in the violent repression directed against the “autonomes” during the demonstrations in Paris by the steel workers from Longwy and Denain: LCR=CRS, or LCRS. [translator's note]

and all humanity to another. There is no question here of preaching non-violence,<sup>16</sup> but rather of defining precisely what violence must be exercised and to what purpose. In this connection, the following points should make the position clearer: firstly, all stereotypes and functions must be revealed for what they are — roles imposed on us by capital; secondly, we must reject the theory which postulates that all those individuals who defend capital should simply be destroyed; thirdly, we cannot make exceptions on the ground that certain people are not free, that it is “the system” which produces both cops and revolutionaries alike. If this were correct, the logical conclusion would be either a position of non-violence, or a situation where human beings become reduced to automatons which would then justify every kind of violence against them. If right from the outset certain people are denied all possibility of humanity, how can they subsequently be expected to emerge as real human beings? So it is as human beings that they must be confronted. Now though the majority of people think in terms of the radical solution provided by class society — i.e., repress your opponents — even in this form the revolution would assert itself according to its true nature, namely that it is human. When the conflict comes, as it inevitably will, there should be no attempt to reduce the various individuals who defend capital to the level of “bestial” or mechanical adversaries; they have to be put in the context of their humanity, for humanity is what they too know they are a part of and are potentially able to find again. In this sense the conflict takes on intellectual and spiritual dimensions. The representations which justify an individual person’s defence of capital must be revealed and demystified; people in this situation must become aware of contradiction, and doubts should arise in their minds.

Terrorism also has to be viewed in this perspective. It is not sufficient just to denounce it as abhorrent. Those who accept terrorism have capitulated before the power of capital. Terrorism is concerned with more than just the destruction of some people: it is also an appeal to death in order to raise up a hypothetical revolt. That aspect should be fairly noted, without condemnation or approval, but it must be rejected as a plan of action. Terrorism implies that the “wall” (the proletariat and its representation) is an impassable and indestructible barrier. Terrorism has admitted defeat, and all the recent examples of it are sufficient proof of this.

We must recognize that the crushing domination of capital affects everyone without exception. Particular groupings cannot be designated as “the elect”, exempt from and unmarked by capital’s despotism. The revolutionary struggle is a human struggle, and it must recognize in every person the possibility of humanity. Amid the conflict with the racketeers in their group-scales, the “capitalists” and the police in all their forms, each individual must be violent with him/herself in order to reject, as outside themselves the domestication of capital and all its comfortable self-validating “explanations”.

## The Terrain of Struggle

None of this can take on its full meaning unless there is a simultaneous refusal of all obsolete forms of struggle. Like the May ’68 movement but more so, the lycée movement emphasized very clearly that staying within the old forms of struggle inevitably leads to certain defeat. It is now becoming generally accepted that demonstrations, marches, spectacles and shows don’t lead anywhere. Waving banners, putting up posters, handing out leaflets, attacking the police are

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<sup>16</sup> Non-violence is itself just an insidious hypocritical form of violence, a sign of certain people’s inability to stand up for themselves as human beings.

all activities which perpetuate a certain ritual — a ritual wherein the police are always cast in the role of invincible subjugators. The methods of struggle therefore must be put through a thorough analysis because they present an obstacle to the creation of new modes of action. And for this to be effective, there has to be a refusal of the old terrain of struggle — both in the workplace and in the streets. As long as revolutionary struggle is conducted not on its own ground but on the terrain of capital, there can be no significant breakthrough, no qualitative revolutionary leap. This is where we must concentrate our attention; it is a question which has to be faced now if revolution is not to stagnate and destroy itself, a setback which could take years to recover from. If we are to successfully abandon the old centres of struggle, it will require a simultaneous movement towards the creation of new modes of life. What's the point of occupying the factories — like car factories for example — where production must be stopped anyway? The cry goes up: "Occupy the factories and manage them ourselves !" So all the prisoners of the system are supposed to take over their prisons and begin the self-management of their own imprisonment. A new social form is not founded on the old, and only rarely in the past do we find civilizations superimposed on one another. The bourgeoisie triumphed because it staged the battle on its own terrain, which is the cities. But in our present situation this can only be helpful to the emergence of communism which is neither a new society nor a new mode of production. Today humanity can launch its battle against capital not in the city, nor in the countryside, but outside of both:<sup>17</sup> hence the necessity for communist forms to appear which will be truly antagonistic to capital, and also rallying points for the forces of revolution. Since the advent of May '68, capital has been obliged to take account of the fact that revolution had presented itself again as a vital imperative, a necessity. In response, the counter-revolution was compelled to adapt and remodel itself (remembering that it has no existence except in relation to revolution). But however much it tries by its usual methods to limit the development of its adversary, it can never totally succeed, because revolution will always present itself as real, and therefore as irrational. This irrationality is its fundamental characteristic. Whatever is rational in relation to the established order can be absorbed and recuperated. If revolution operates on the same terrain as its adversary, it can always be halted. It cannot rise up; it is thwarted in its most passionate desire, which is to realize its own project and to accomplish it on its own ground.

The attaining of a human community must be the goal towards which revolution moves. The revolutionary movement must therefore reflect within itself the same purpose and aim. The methods provided by class society lead us away from this goal; by their very nature they are inhuman, and it is therefore not possible to use them. Thus it is absurd to want to penetrate the structures of the established order to make them function in the interests of the revolutionary movement. Those who operate in this way are labouring under the mystification that the historical project approaches its truth and its end in capital. That mystification which presents the human being as inessential, not determinant, and useless has to be exposed. In the capitalist system humans

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<sup>17</sup> The old opposition between city and country clearly no longer exists. Capital has urbanized the planet; Nature has become mineralized (made inorganic). We are now seeing new conflicts between urban centres and those parts of the countryside where a few peasants still remain. Urban centres demand more and more water which means building numerous reservoirs at distances of fifty or even a hundred miles from the city. This leads to the destruction of good agricultural land as well as land for hunting and fishing; it also results in the peasants being deprived of water since all the sources are drawn off to fill reservoirs and channels. This conflict can affect the same person from two angles if he/she lives in the town and owns a second "house in the country". We can see now that the problem extends well beyond the question of the traditional peasantry; it now involves the global relationship of people to the natural world and a reconsideration of their actual mode of being.



have in effect become superfluous, but to the extent that humanity has preserved an unbroken human consistency from its earliest origins, it cannot be said to have been destroyed as long as the idea of revolt remains alive, and provided also that young people are not totally immobilized by domestication. All is still possible. In every case, struggle tends to revive the human essence which is preserved in each individual; struggle takes us out of the trap of perceiving others only as their reified outward appearance. Even where an individual has attained a high degree of reification and been transformed into an organic automaton of capital, there is still the possibility that the whole construction could break apart. Here we would do well to follow an old piece of advice from Marx: It's not enough to make the chains visible, they must become shameful. Each individual should experience a crisis. In conflicts with the police, the impulse should be not only to eliminate a repressive force which presents an obstacle to the communist movement but also to bring down the system, provoking in the minds of the police a sense of human resurgence.

This can never happen if the old methods of direct confrontation continue to be used; we have got to find new methods, such as treating all institutions with contempt and ridicule<sup>18</sup> by leaving them trapped and isolated in their own concerns. It would be absurd to theorize and make generalizations about this. But we can be certain of one thing: it has proved effective in the past, and it will be again, but we must invent a host of other different modes of action. The essential point is to understand that the terrain and methods of struggle must be changed; this necessity has been understood in a limited and sometimes negative way by people who abandon everything and go on the roads, expressing their desire to leave the vicious circle of struggles that go on in the day-to-day world.

The leftists persist in their well known cycle of provocation-repression-subversion which is all supposed to bring about revolution at some precise time in the future. But this conception of revolution is totally inadmissible because it means sacrificing men and women in order to mobilize others. Communist revolution does not demand martyrs because it does not need to make any demands. The martyr becomes the bait which attracts the followers. What would then be the use of a revolution that uses death as a bait in this way?<sup>19</sup> But then there is always someone who dies at just the right time (or the victim's demise may even be "facilitated"), and someone else goes around shaking the cadaver in order to attract the revolutionary flies.

Since the communist revolution is the triumph of life, it cannot in any way glorify death, or seek to exploit it, since this would be putting itself once more on the terrain of class society. There are some who would compare or substitute "those who fell in the revolution" with those who died in the service of capital: but it's all just the same old carnival of carrion !

Revolution is never presented as having the scope of a necessary and also a naturally occurring phenomenon, and this misunderstanding has serious consequences. It always seems that revolution depends strictly on some group or other radiating true consciousness. We are faced today with the following alternatives: either there is actual revolution — the whole process, from the formation of revolutionaries to the destruction of the capitalist mode of production — or there is destruction, under one form or another of the human species. There is no other possibility.

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<sup>18</sup> Which is how one would have to regard the actions of those American psychiatrists who voluntarily commit themselves to psychiatric clinics, thereby demonstrating the there is no system of knowledge capable of defining madness. (We might add that the production of actual madness is necessary to the existence of capital).

<sup>19</sup> Death has become an essential element in people's coming to consciousness of themselves, but such consciousness is transmitted only with great difficulty. The passage from the exterior to the interior is too laborious, but fortunately the expedients and shortcuts are there.

When revolution is unleashed there will be no need to justify what is happening; rather it will be a question of being powerful enough to avoid abuses and excesses. And this is possible only if individual men and women, before the revolutionary explosion, begin to be autonomous: since they don't need any leaders, they can gain mastery over their own revolt.

Obviously in the present circumstances people can only go so far in this direction; but the only way it has a chance of true realization is by rejecting that cannibalistic discourse which presents revolution as a settling of scores, as a physical extermination of one class or group of people by another. If communism really is a necessity for the human species, it has no need of such methods to impose itself.

In general, most revolutionaries doubt that revolution will ever come about, but in order to convince themselves that it will, they have to justify it to themselves in some way. This allows them to deal with the waiting, but it also masks the fact that most of the time manifestations of real revolution pass them by. To exorcise their doubt they resort to verbal violence (again a substitute), and are constantly engaged in desperate and obstinate proselytizing. The justification process works like this: as soon as they've made some recruits, this is taken as proof that the situation is favourable, and so the level of agitation must be stepped up, and so on and so on. According to this scheme of things, revolution means agitation which means bringing consciousness from outside. They haven't yet grasped the fact that revolution is accomplished precisely when there is no one left to defend the old order; revolution triumphs because there are no more adversaries. The point is that everything is going to be different afterwards, which is where the problem of violence again becomes relevant. The necessity for communism is a necessity which extends to all people. During the ferment of revolution this is a truth which will become evident in a more or less confused way. It does not mean that people will somehow be rid of all the old rubbish of the previous society overnight. It means that those who will be making the revolution will be people of the right as well as the left; thus when the superstructural elements of the capitalist system are destroyed and the global process of production halted, the presuppositions of capital will remain intact, and the old forms of behaviour and the old schemas will tend to reappear because it seems that each time humanity embarks on a new opportunity, a creation, it tends to wrap it up in the forms of the past and readapt it to the times. Certainly, the communist revolution will not develop in the same way as previous revolutions, but if its scope is limited to any degree, it will nonetheless still be part of the content of the post-revolutionary movement. The movement will tend to give new dimensions to the human community, reaffirming and strengthening what will have emerged during the course of revolution. It is at this stage, when things are difficult, that the old institutional forms can reappear, and some elements may want to reassert their privileges in a disguised form, and try to make solutions prevail that favour them. Others might want to reintroduce self-management. They still will not have understood that communism is not a mode of production, but a new mode of being.

This is also the time when the old practice of categorizing everything, so characteristic of all rackets, must be eliminated once and for all. We have to understand that new things can spring up draped in the mantle of the past; it would be a major error to consider only these superficial semblances of the past to the exclusion of everything else. It's not a question of seeing the postrevolutionary movement as the apotheosis of immediate reconciliation, when by some miracle the oppressiveness of the past will abolish itself. Granted that the new mode of being will generate itself through effective struggle, the issue then becomes the modality of that struggle. Any sectarian or inquisitorial spirit is lethal to the revolution — which is all the more reason

why the classical dictatorship is out of the question, since this would mean re-establishing a mode of being which is intrinsic to class society. The period of intermediate change cannot be transcended except through a diverse expression of liberation by multifarious human beings. This is the pressure which communism brings to bear. It is a pressure exerted by the great majority of human beings seeking to create the human community which will allow and enable them to remove all obstacles barring their way. This affirmation of life is what Marx had in mind when he said "if we assume man to be man, and his relation to the world to be a human one, then love can be exchanged only for love, trust for trust..." Violent clashes can only be exceptional.

Those who believe that what is required is a dictatorship have already conceded in their minds that human society will never be ready to grow towards communism. It is a long, painful and difficult road to that extraordinary realization that the mystification no longer holds, that the wandering of humanity was leading to its own destruction, and that this was largely due to the fact that it had entrusted its destiny to the monstrous, autonomized system of capital.<sup>20</sup> Men and women will come to realize that they themselves are the determining elements, and that they do not have to abdicate their power to the machine, and alienate their being in the false belief that this will lead to happiness.

The moment this point is reached, it's all over, and going back will be impossible. The entire representation of capital All collapse like a house of cards. People whose minds are free from capital will be able to find themselves and their fellow creatures as well. From this time onwards, the creation of a human community can no longer be halted.

Ideology, science, art and the rest, through the entire range of institutions and organizations act together to instill the belief that human beings are inessential and powerless to act.<sup>21</sup> More than this, they all enforce the idea that if we seem to have arrived at a particular stage of social evolution, it is because it could not have been otherwise from the very beginning when we first appropriated and developed technology. There is a certain fatality which surrounds technology: if

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<sup>20</sup> A process described as "prosthesis" by Cesarano and Collu in *Apocalisse et Rivoluzione* (Dedalo, Bari, 1973). The book presents itself as "a manifesto for biological revolution" and no resumé could do justice to its great richness of thought. (The authors also take up the question of representation and symbolism in social relations. See note 7). Here are two passages which give a small insight into their position: The progressive thinkers who produced the MIT report (*Man's Impact on the Global Environment*, 1972) and also the propositions put forward by Mansholt all suggest that capital cannot survive unless it continually increases the volume of commodity production (the basis of its valorization process). But they are mistaken in this if their understanding of commodity is restricted to things. It doesn't matter whether the commodity form is a thing or "a person". In order for capital to continue its growth it requires only this: that within the process of circulation there must be a moment when one commodity of whatever kind assumes the task of exchanging itself for A in order to subsequently exchange itself with X. In theory this is perfectly possible, provided that constant capital, instead of being invested mainly in projects to manufacture objects, is devoted to projects designed to create corporate people ("social services", "personnel services"). (p. 82) Fiction (le fictif) reaches its final peak of coher ence when it is able to present itself as a complete representation and hence as an organization of appearances which is completely unreal; ultimately it is able to separate itself definitively from the concrete, to such a degree that it disappears altogether. (Thus fiction is the essence of all religions). The human species will be able to emancipate itself definitively from prosthesis and free itself from fiction and religion only when it openly recognizes itself as subjectively acting as an indissoluble part of the organic movement of nature in its global process. Biological revolution consists in reversing once and for all the relationship which has been a feature of all prehistory (i.e. all the period preceding the communist revolution), whereby the physical existence of the species is subordinated to the role of the social mechanism; it is the emancipation of organic subjectivity, the taming of the machine once and for all in whatever form it may appear. (p. 153)

<sup>21</sup> We are referring here not to the human being as an individual existing in a particular historical period, but as an invariant constant.

we do not embrace it, we cannot progress. All we can do is remedy certain shortcomings, but we cannot escape the workings of the machine, which is this society itself. The trap has been closed, people have been immobilized, and the determining factor here is the representation of capital — it represents itself (i.e. capital) as a rational social process, which gives rise to the feeling that the system can no longer be perceived as oppressive. In order to explain any negative aspects, capital simply invokes categories designated as “outside of capital”.

The long habit of mind which has allowed human intelligence to be a host for the parasitical representation of capital has to be broken down. The mentality and behaviour of the servant (whose master is capital) must be eradicated. This need is now all the more urgent as the old dialectic of master and slave is tending to disappear in the process whereby even the slave — the human being — is becoming redundant.

## The Global Perspective

The struggle against domestication has to be understood at the global level where important forces are also beginning to emerge. The a priori universal rationality of capitalism can be demystified only when we begin to seriously question the unilinear scheme of human evolution and also the notion that the capitalist mode of production has been progressive for all countries.

Those particular countries which according to the prophets of growth and the “economic miracle” are underdeveloped or on the road to development are really countries where the capitalist mode of production has failed to establish itself. In Asia, South America, and Africa there are millions of people who have not yet fully succumbed to the despotism of capital. Their resistance is usually negative in the sense that they are unable to pose for themselves another community. It is therefore essential to maintain a world wide network of human debate which only the communist revolution can transform into a movement for the establishing of a new community. Moreover, during the revolutionary explosion this network or pole will have a determining influence in the work of destroying capital.

In those countries labelled as underdeveloped, the youth have risen up (in Ceylon, in Madagascar in 1972, and less strongly in Senegal, Tunisia, Zaire etc...), and expressed in different ways the same need and necessity that is felt in the West. For over ten years the insurrection of youth has demonstrated that its fundamental characteristic is that of anti-domestication. Without wanting to prophesy any certain outcome, it is important to try to discern in this some kind of perspective. In May '68 we again took up Bordiga's forecast about a revival of the revolutionary movement around 1968, and revolution for the period 1975–1980. This is a “prediction” we remain attached to. Recent political/social and economic events confirm it, and the same conclusion is being arrived at by various writers. The capitalist mode of production finds itself in a crisis which is shaking it from its highest to its lowest levels. It is not a 1929-style crisis, though certain aspects of that crisis can reappear; rather it is a crisis of profound transformation. Capital must restructure itself in order to be able to slow down the destructive consequences of its global process of production. The whole debate about growth shows very clearly that this concern is real. The experts think they can simply draw attention to the movement of capital and proclaim that there must be slackening off, a slowing down. But capital in its turn can only break free from people's opposition by perfecting its domination over them at an ever higher level. It is a domination which extends to the horizon of our lives, but young people are rising up against it in a

vast movement, and a growing number of older people are beginning to understand and support them.

The revolutionary resurgence is evident everywhere except in one enormous country, the USSR, which could quite easily end up playing an inhibiting role, putting a strong brake on the revolution (in which case our previous forecast would be consigned to the limbo of pious wish fulfilment). But events in Czechoslovakia and Poland and the constant strengthening of despotism in the Soviet republic are an indication (though a negative one) that subversion, of which we hear only faint echoes, is by no means absent there. Repression in the USSR needs to be more violent in order to prevent insurrection generalizing. On the other hand, the process of destalinization is taking on the same role (taking into account considerable historical differences) as the revolt of the nobles in 1825, which made way for the revolt of the intelligentsia and subsequently gave strength to the whole populist movement. This idea leads us to think that there exists at the present moment subversion sufficient to go well beyond the democratic opposition expressed by the dissident academician Sakharov. Certain other historical constants must be kept in mind: for example, generalized revolutionary action appeared in its most radical form in France and Russia, while actually having its origins in other countries. The French revolution subsequently spread the bourgeois revolution throughout Europe. The Russian revolution generalized a double revolution — proletarian and bourgeois — which resulted in the final triumph of the capitalist revolution. The student revolt did not originate in France yet it was there that the revolt was felt most sharply; it was capable of shaking capitalist society, and the consequences of it are still being felt. There can be no revolutionary upheaval in the USSR while the consequences of 1917 — the wave of anti-colonial revolutions — are still to be played out. The most important of these has been the case of China, and now that the Chinese revolution has come to the end of its cycle, we will see in the USSR the beginning of a new revolutionary cycle.

The important historic shift between the French and the Russian revolutions is present also in the rise of the new revolutionary cycle. The despotism of capital today is more powerful than that which prevailed under the Czar, and there is also the fact that the holy alliance between the USSR and the USA has been shown to be more effective than the Anglo-Russian alliance of the nineteenth century. The outcome can be delayed but not halted: we can expect the “communitarian” dimension of revolution in the USSR to be clearer there than in the West, and that it will go forward with giant strides.

## Revolution and the Future

During a period of total counter-revolution, Bordiga was able to withstand the disintegrating effect brought about by it because he retained a vision of the coming revolution, but more particularly because he shifted his focus of thinking concerning struggle. He did not look only to the past, which is just a dead weight in such a period, nor did he incline towards the present, dominated as it was by the established order, but towards the future.<sup>22</sup>

Being thus attuned to the future enabled him to perceive the revolutionary movement as it actually was, and not according to its own characterizations. Since that time, the “future indus-

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<sup>22</sup> Bordiga once maintained that “we are the only ones to ground our action in the future”. In 1952 he wrote: “Our strength lies more in the science of the future than in that of the past or present.” (“Explorateurs de l’avenir”, *Battaglia Comunista* no. 6)

try”<sup>23</sup> has come into its own and assumed an enormous scope. Capital enters this new field and begins to exploit it, which leads to a further expropriation of people, and a reinforcement of their domestication. This hold over the future is what distinguishes capital from all other modes of production. From its earliest origins capital’s relationship to the past or present has always been of less importance to it than its relationship to the future. Capital’s only lifeblood is in the exchange it conducts with labour power. Thus when surplus value is created, it is, in the immediate sense, only potential capital; it can become effective capital solely through an exchange against future labour. In other words, when surplus value is created in the present, it acquires reality only if labour power can appear to be ready and available in a future (a future which can only be hypothetical, and not necessarily very near). If therefore this future isn’t there, then the present (or henceforth the past) is abolished: this is devalorization through total loss of substance. Clearly then capital’s first undertaking must be to dominate the future in order to be assured of accomplishing its production process. (This conquest is managed by the credit system). Thus capital has effectively appropriated time, which it moulds in its own image as quantitative time. However, present surplus value was realized and valorized through exchange against future labour, but now, with the development of the “future industry”, present surplus value has itself become open to capitalization. This capitalization demands that time be programmed, and this need expresses itself in a scientific fashion in futurology. Henceforth, capital produces time.<sup>24</sup> From now on where may people situate their utopias and uchronias?

The established societies that existed in previous times dominated the present and to a lesser extent the past, while the revolutionary movement had for itself the future. Bourgeois revolutions and proletarian revolutions have had to guarantee progress, but this progress depended on the existence of a future valorized in relation to a present and a past which is to be abolished. In each case, and to a degree which is more or less pronounced depending on which type of revolution is being considered, the past is presented as shrouded in darkness, while the future is all shining light. Capital has conquered the future. Capital has no fear of utopias, since it even tends to produce them. The future is a field for the production of profit. In order to generate the future, to bring it into being, people must now be conditioned as a function of a strictly preconceived process of production: this is programming brought to its highest point. Man, once characterized by Marx as “the carcass of time” is now excluded from time. This, together with the domination of the past, the present and the future, gives rise to a structural representation, where everything is reduced to a combinative of social relations, productive forces, or mythèmes etc., arranged in such a way as to cohere as a totality. Structure, perfecting itself, eliminates history. But history is what people have made.

This leads to the understanding that revolution must not only engender another conception of time, but must also assimilate it to a new synthesis of space. Both will be created simultaneously as they emerge out of the new relationship between human beings and nature: reconciliation.

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<sup>23</sup> “L’industrie du futur” e.g. futurology, the technological revolution, marketing, resources planning, space exploration etc. translators note]

<sup>24</sup> Capital is characterized not so much by the way it emphasizes quantity while denying quality, but rather by the fact that there exists a fundamental contradiction between the two, with the quantitative tending to overwhelm all aspects of quality. It is not a question of realizing the desire for quality by denying quantity (in the same way, one does not arrive at use value by suppressing exchange value). It will require a total mutation before all the logic of this domination can be swept away. For quality and quantity both exist in close affinity with measurement, and all are in turn linked to value. Measurement operates to an equal degree at the level of use value, as well as exchange value. In the former case, it is closely bound up with one type of domination: use values measure a particular person’s social

We said before that all which is fragmented is grist to the mill of the counter-revolution. But revolution means more than reclaiming just the totality; it is the reintegration of all that was separate, a coming together of future being, individuality and Gemeinwesen. This future being already exists as a total and passionately felt need; it expresses better than anything else the true revolutionary character of the May '68 movement and that of the lycée students in Spring 1973.

Revolutionary struggle is struggle against domination as it appears in all times and places, and in all the different aspects of life. For five years this contestation has invaded every department of the life of capital. Revolution is now able to pose its true terrain of struggle, whose centre is everywhere, but whose place is nowhere.<sup>25</sup> Its task in this sense is infinite: to destroy domestication and engender the infinite manifestation of the human being of the future. We have a feeling, which is founded on more than just optimism, that the next five years will see the beginning of revolution, and the destruction of the capitalist mode of production.<sup>26</sup>

Jacques Camatte 1 May 1973

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position, and are also a measure of the weight of oppression they bear. Use values impose their own despotism which envelops the other despotism (exchange value), and now also that of capital. Marx, in his notes to J.S. Mill's work, denounced utilitarianism as a philosophy in which man is valued only in terms of his use, while exchange tends to autonomize itself.

<sup>25</sup> This is Blanqui's definition of infinity which is itself a slight modification of Pascal's famous phrase. (The French is: "le centre est partout, la surface nulle part" — translators note)

<sup>26</sup> "From our present point of view, this prediction seems to be wrong. But we should bear in mind that predictions can never be made with absolute accuracy; the overall process will generally tend to lag behind what we forecast will happen, and there is also the factor that every such prediction is an expression of a particular individual's, own profound desire. And desire is always in a hurry, it doesn't know how to wait.

We should discuss the future realistically: i.e. in terms of the movement and process towards revolution, and from the standpoint that we must abandon this world. But it cannot be stated as simply as that; it starts to look like equivocation. We ought to be able now to examine the forecast we made and what emerges from it. What is true about it is the fact that in 1978, the refusal we have often spoken about is now more manifest, more definitely present than it has been in the years preceding. This refusal moreover, is heavy with consequences for capital's destruction.

"What we have said so far has been concerned with the permanent element of the perspective, but it doesn't clarify particularly the situation at the present, where we find that the concern is no longer with a struggle against capital as such. In 1973, one could already see that the destruction aimed at capital was indirect: it did not come from men and women forming a frontal opposition against it. If the system suffers from instability — the 'crisis' as the economists now call it — this doesn't of itself call capital into question, and the catastrophe is only just beginning to develop its premises (though the pace of events can accelerate quickly).

"One fundamental thing to emerge since 1978 is the fact that we are fast approaching the end of the cycle of capital. It is more intensive now, but also more extensive, and from either point of view this makes it easier for us to abandon capital. Taking up a position about something that is already achieved and finished is easy; it is much harder with something that is still in the process of formation and development." (from "la separation necessaire et l'immense refus", 1979)

This is as clear as I was able to get it in January 1979 when that piece was written. In a more recent article ("l'Echo du Temps", Feb. 1980) I try to describe more accurately how this "destruction" of the community of capital can come about. It is an attempt to take up the question of what I call capital's potential death, which is due to its movement of anthropomorphization and the capitalization of human beings.

As capital openly installs its community it realizes a project of the human species and at the same time exhausts its possibilities. Being real contemporaries of our period requires a clear realization of the potential death of capital, in order that we may subsequently embark on a new dynamic of life. (Author's note, March 1980)

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Jacques Camatte  
Against Domestication  
1973

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# **The Wandering of Humanity**

Jacques Camatte

1973

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## Original Black & Red Introduction

The essays included in the present work first appeared in the journal *Invariance* (Année 6, Série II No. 3, 1973) with the titles, “Errance de l’humanité; Conscience repressive; Communisme,” and “Declin du mode de production capitaliste ou declin de l’humanité?” The author of these essays, Jacques Camatte, worked with Amadeo Bordiga and the group of Marxist theoreticians who were known as the Italian communist left. After the events which took place in France in May of 1968, Camatte, together with his comrades on *Invariance*, began a critical analysis of the activities of the Italian communist left, the work of Bordiga as well as the work of Marx. The title of the journal originally referred to “the invariance of the theory of the proletariat,” the theory of the League of Communists and the First International. By 1973 critics said of this journal that “nothing varies more than *Invariance*.” Camatte and his comrades, pursuing the critical analysis they had begun, were led to conclude that “what is invariant is the aspiration to rediscover the lost human community, and this cannot take place through a reestablishment of the past, but only through new creation.” Their theoretical quest led them to a complete rejection of the theory of revolutionary parties and organizations, the theory of revolutionary consciousness, the theory of the progressive development of productive forces. “The French May movement showed that what is needed is a new mode of living, a new life.” (The above quotations are from the last article in *Invariance* No. 3, 1973.)

(...) The essays in the present work were translated from French by Fredy Perlman with assistance from Camatte; the illustrations were selected and prepared by Allan Foster; Lorraine Perlman and Judy Campbell participated in the photography, printing and binding. (...)

# **I. Repressive Consciousness — Communism**

# 1. Despotism of Capital

When capital achieves real domination over society, it becomes a material community, overcoming value and the law of value, which survive only as something “overcome.” Capital accomplishes this in two ways: 1) the quantity of labor included in the product-capital diminishes enormously (devalorization); 2) the exchange relation tends increasingly to disappear, first from the wage relation, then from all economic transactions. Capital, which originally depended on the wage relation, becomes a despot. When there is value it is assigned by capital.

Capital is capital in process. It acquired this attribute with the rise of fictive capital, when the opposition valorization/devalorization still had meaning, when capital had not yet really overcome the law of value.

Capital in process is capital in constant movement; it capitalizes everything, assimilates everything and makes it its own substance. Having become autonomous, it is “reified form” in movement. It becomes intangible. It revitalizes its being — that vast metabolism which absorbs ancient exchanges or reduces them to exchanges of a biological type — by despoiling all human beings in their varied activities, however fragmented these may be (this is why capital pushes human beings to engage in the most diverse activities). It is humanity that is exploited. More than ever the expression “exploitation of man by man” becomes repulsive.

In its perfected state, capital is representation. Its rise to this state is due to its anthropomorphization, namely to its capitalization of human beings,<sup>1</sup> and to its supersession of the old general equivalent, gold. Capital needs an ideal representation, since a representation with substance inhibits its process. Gold, if it is not totally demonetized, can no longer play the role of standard. Capitalized human activity becomes the standard of capital, until even this dependence on value and its law begin to disappear completely. This presupposes the integration of human beings in the process of capital and the integration of capital in the minds of human beings.

Capital becomes representation through the following historical movement: exchange value becomes autonomous, human beings are expropriated, human activity is reduced to labor, and labor is reduced to abstract labor. This takes place when capital rises on the foundation of the law of value. Capital becomes autonomous by domesticating the human being. After analyzing-dissecting-fragmenting the human being, capital reconstructs the human being as a function of its process. The rupture of the body from the mind made possible the transformation of the mind into a computer which can be programmed by the laws of capital. Precisely because of their mental capacities, human beings are not only enslaved, but turned into willing slaves of capital. What seems like the greatest paradox is that capital itself reintroduces subjectivity, which had been eliminated at the time of the rise of exchange value. All human activity is exploited by capital. We can rephrase Marx’s statement, “Labor, by adding a new value to the old one, at the same time maintains and eternizes [capital]”<sup>2</sup> to say: all human activity “eternizes” capital.

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<sup>1</sup> This does not exclude an opposite movement: capital forces human beings to be human.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, London: Pelican, 1973, p. 365.

Capital as representation overcomes the old contradiction between monopoly and competition. Every quantum of capital tends to become a totality; competition operates between the various capitals, each of which tends to become the totality. Production and circulation are unified; the ancient opposition between use value and exchange value loses its *raison d'être*. Besides, consumption is the utilization of not only material products but mostly representations that increasingly structure human beings as beings of capital and revitalize capital as the general representation. Prices no longer have the function they had in the period of formal domination of capital, when they were representations of value; they become mere indices or signs of representations of capital. Free goods are not impossible. Capital could assign a specific quantity of its products to each programmed individual; this quantity might depend on the required activity imposed on this individual. Such a despotism would be more powerful than the present one. Human beings would wish they had the money which had “given” them free access to the diversity of products.

During its development capital always tended to negate classes. This has finally been accomplished through the universalization of wage labor and the formation — as a transitional stage — of what is called the universal class, a mere collection of proletarianized men and women, a collection of slaves of capital. Capital achieved complete domination by mystifying the demands of the classical proletariat, by dominating the proletarian as productive laborer. But by achieving domination through the mediation of labor, capital brought about the disappearance of classes, since the capitalist as a person was simultaneously eliminated.<sup>3</sup> The State becomes society when the wage relation is transformed into a relation of constraint, into a statist relation. At the same time the State becomes an enterprise or racket which mediates between the different gangs of capital.

Bourgeois society has been destroyed and we have the despotism of capital. Class conflicts are replaced by struggles between the gangs-organizations which are the varied modes of being of capital. As a result of the domination of representation, all organizations which want to oppose capital are engulfed by it; they are consumed by phagocytes.

It is the real end of democracy. One can no longer hold that there is a class which **represents** future humanity, and *a fortiori* there is no party, no group; there can be no delegation of power.

Advertising crassly reflects the fact that capital is representation, that it survives because it is representation in the mind of each human being (internalizing what was externalized). Advertising is the discourse of capital:<sup>4</sup> everything is possible, all norms have disappeared. Advertising organizes the subversion of the present for the sake of an apparently different future.

“We now face the problem of letting the average American feel moral when he flirts, when he spends, even when he buys a second or third car. One of the basic problems of this prosperity is to give people sanction and justification to enjoy it, to show them that making their lives a pleasure is moral and not immoral. This permission given to the consumer to freely enjoy life, this demonstration that he has a right to surround himself with products that enrich his existence and give him pleasure,

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<sup>3</sup> Here we see a convergence with the Asiatic mode of production, where classes could never become autonomous; in the capitalist mode of production they are absorbed.

<sup>4</sup> See the book of D. Verres, *Le discours du capitalisme*, Ed. L’Herne. interesting material will also be found in the works of Baudrillard: *Le système des objets* and *Pour une critique de l’économle politique du signe*, Ed. Gallimard.

should be one of the main themes of all advertising and of every project designed to increase sales.”<sup>5</sup>

The disintegration of consciousness which can be seen in manifestations like the women’s liberation movement, the gay liberation movement and anti-psychiatry (which are only possible after the work of Freud, Reich, and the feminist movement at the beginning of this century) is not part of the simultaneous emergence of revolutionary consciousness, but only reflects the end of bourgeois society based on value, on a fixed standard which affected all levels of human life. The disintegration began when the general equivalent conflicted with circulation. If the former general equivalent gave way, it was lost. The State had to force all subjects to respect a normalcy based on a standard which established the values of society. The law of value imprisoned human beings, forcing them into stereotypes, into fixed modes of being. The highest development of morality appeared in Kant’s categorical imperative. By engulfing the general equivalent, by becoming its own representation, capital removed the prohibitions and rigid schemas. At that point human beings are fixed to its movement, which can take off from the normal or abnormal, moral or immoral human being.

The finite, limited human being, the individual of bourgeois society, is disappearing. People are passionately calling for the liberated human being, a being who is at once a social being and a *Gemeinwesen*. But at present it is capital that is recomposing man, giving him form and matter; communal being comes in the form of collective worker, individuality in the form of consumer of capital. Since capital is indefinite it allows the human being to have access to a state beyond the finite in an infinite becoming of appropriation which is never realized, renewing at every instant the illusion of total blossoming.

The human being in the image of capital ceases to consider any event definitive, but as an instant in an infinite process. Enjoyment is allowed but is never possible. Man becomes a sensual and passive voyeur, capital a sensual and suprasensual being. Human life ceases to be a process and becomes linear. Aspired by the process of capital, man can no longer be “himself.” This aspiration evacuates him, creating a vacuum which he must continually satisfy with representations (capital). More generally, capital in process secures its domination by making every process linear. Thus it breaks the movement of nature, and this leads to the destruction of nature. But if this destruction might endanger its own process, capital adapts itself to nature (by anti-pollution, for example).

The non-living becomes autonomous — and triumphs. Death in life: Hegel had intuited it, Nietzsche described it, Rainer Maria Rilke sang about it, Freud almost institutionalized it (the death instinct), Dada exhibited it as buffoon art, and the “fascists” exalted it: “Long live death.” The U.S. feminist movement has individualized it:

“The male likes death — it excites him sexually and, already dead inside, he wants to die.”<sup>6</sup>

The autonomy of form affects all aspects of life dominated by capital. Knowledge is valid only if it is formalized, if it is emptied of content. Absolute knowledge is tautology realized; it is dead form deployed over all knowledge. Science is its systematization; epistemology is its redundancy.

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<sup>5</sup> Dichter, cited by Baudrillard in *Le système des objets*, pp. 218–219.

<sup>6</sup> Valerie Solanas, *The SCUM Manifesto* (The Society for Cutting Up Men), New York: Olympia Press, 1970.

In the era of its real domination, capital has run away (as the cyberneticians put it), it has escaped.<sup>7</sup> It is no longer controlled by human beings. (Human beings in the form of proletarians might, at least passively, represent a barrier to capital.) It is no longer limited by nature. Some production processes carried out over periods of time lead to clashes with natural barriers: increase in the number of human beings, destruction of nature, pollution. But these barriers cannot be theoretically regarded as barriers which capital cannot supersede. At present there are three possible courses for the capitalist mode of production (in addition to the destruction of humanity — a hypothesis that cannot be ignored):

- complete autonomy of capital: a mechanistic utopia where human beings become simple accessories of an automated system, though still retaining an executive role;
- mutation of the human being, or rather a change of the species: production of a perfectly programmable being which has lost all the characteristics of the species *Homo sapiens*. This would not require an automatized system, since this perfect human being would be made to do whatever is required;
- generalized lunacy: in the place of human beings, and on the basis of their present limitations, capital realizes everything they desire (normal or abnormal), but human beings cannot find themselves and enjoyment continually lies in the future. The human being is carried off in the run-away of capital, and keeps it going.<sup>8</sup>

The result is ultimately the same: the evolution of the human being is frozen, sooner in one case than in another. These possibilities are abstract limits; in reality they tend to unfold simultaneously and in a contradictory manner. To continue on its indefinite course, capital is forced to call on the activity of human beings, to exalt their creativity. And to secure its permanence,

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<sup>7</sup> We analyzed the autonomization of capital in *Le VI<sup>e</sup> chapitre inédit du Capital et l'oeuvre économique de Marx* (1966), particularly in the notes added in 1972.

In a future article we will analyze this subject more thoroughly by showing that Marx had raised the problem without recognizing it in its totality, and by analyzing the capitalist mode of production of today. This will also lead us to define labor and its role in the development of humanity. G. Brulé already began such an analysis in his article in *Invariance* No. 2, Série II: "Le travail, le travail productif et les mythes de la classe ouvrière et de la classe moyenne." (Labor, productive labor and the myths of the working class and the middle class).

In general we can say that the concept of labor is reductive: it encompasses only one part of human activity. But the call for its abolition is a call for the destruction of this remainder of activity, which is a utopian demand of capital. The project of communism inserts itself into the context of human life, activity being no more than a modality of expression. Love, meditation, day-dreaming, play and other manifestations of human beings are placed outside the field of life when we trap ourselves within the concept of labor. Marx defined labor as an activity which transforms nature or matter for one or another purpose, but the concept of nature can no longer be accepted as it is. In the period of domination of capital, the human being is no longer in contact with nature (especially during work). Between nature and the individual lies capital. Capital becomes nature.

On the other hand, in his so-called "philosophical" works, Marx clearly refers to all human activity and asserts that communism cannot be reduced to the liberation of labor. This position does not completely disappear from the rest of Marx's works, and survives alongside the "revolutionary reformist" conception expressed in *Capital*. For the Marxists the problem is subsequently simplified: they exalt labor, pure and simple. In Trotsky's work, for example, there is no longer a trace of Marx's complex analysis, but rather a display of the language of domestication, the language of capital: "The entire history of humanity is a history of the organization and education of social man for labor, with a view to obtaining from him greater productivity." (*Terrorism and Communism* (French ed.: Paris: Ed. 10/18, 1963, p. 2181.)

<sup>8</sup> This possibility is described and exalted in *Future Shock* by Alvin Toffler.



capital has to act quickly. It runs into barriers of time and space which are linked to the decrease of natural resources (which cannot all be replaced by synthetic substitutes) and the mad increase of human population (which causes the disappearance of numerous forms of life).

It becomes clear that raising the banner of labor or its abolition remains on the terrain of capital, within the framework of its evolution. Even the movement toward unlimited generalization of desire is isomorphic to the indefinite movement of capital.

The capitalist mode of production is not decadent and cannot be decadent. Bourgeois society disintegrated, to be sure, but this did not lead to communism. At most we can say that communism was affirmed in opposition to bourgeois society, but not in opposition to capital. The run-away of capital was not perceived; in fact this run-away was realized only with the rise of the fascist, Nazi, popular front movements, the New Deal, etc., movements which are transitions from formal to real domination. It was thought that communism was emerging from the socialization of human activity and thus from the destruction of private property, while in fact capital was emerging as a material community.

## 2. Growth of Productive Forces; Domestication of Human Beings

The capitalist mode of production becomes decadent only with the outbreak of effective revolution against capital. As of now, human beings have been decaying for a century, they have been domesticated by capital. This domestication is the source of the proletariat's inability to liberate humanity. Productive forces continue to grow, but these are forces of capital.

“Capitalist production develops technique and the combination of the social production process only by simultaneously using up the two sources from which all wealth springs: the land and the laborer.”<sup>1</sup>

It makes no sense to proclaim that humanity's productive forces have stopped growing, that the capitalist mode of production has begun to decay. Such views reveal the inability of many theoreticians to recognize the run-away of capital and thus to understand communism and the communist revolution. Paradoxically, Marx analyzed the decomposition of bourgeois society and the conditions for the development of the capitalist mode of production: a society where productive forces could develop freely. What he presented as the project of communism was realized by capital.

Marx elaborated a dialectic of the development of productive forces.<sup>2</sup> He held that human emancipation depended on their fullest expansion. Communist revolution — therefore the end of the capitalist mode of production — was to take place when this mode of production was no longer “large enough” to contain the productive forces. But Marx is trapped in an ambiguity. He thinks that the human being is a barrier to capital, and that capital destroys the human being as a fetter to its development as productive power. Marx also suggests that capital can escape from the human barrier. He is led to postulate a self-negation of capital. This self-negation takes the form of crises which he perceived either as moments when capital is restructured (a regeneration carried out by the destruction of products inhibiting the process: another reason why capitalism must disappear), or as the actual moment when capital is destroyed.

In other words, while providing the elements necessary for understanding the real domination of capital over society, Marx did not develop the concept; he did not recognize the run-away of capital. For Marx, gold remained a barrier to capital, the contradiction between valorization and devalorization remained in force, and the plunder and estrangement of proletarians remained an obstacle to the evolution of capital.

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<sup>1</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I [ *Le Capital*, I, 1, t. 2, p. 182. ]

<sup>2</sup> This requires a detailed study which would include the analysis of labor. In the article which follows we begin this study: it presents the first conclusions we've reached. In particular we want to analyze the stage of this decadence of humanity, how it is expressed, etc. In addition we want to show the intimate connection between the movement of value and the dialectic of the productive forces. The end of the movement of value and of capital is the end of a mode of representation and destroys its autonomy. The Marxian dialectic will be completely overcome.

“In the development of productive forces there comes a stage when productive forces and means of intercourse are brought into being, which, under the existing relationships, only cause mischief, and are no longer productive but destructive forces (machinery and money)...”

(Before continuing the citation, we should mention the retardation of those who proclaim that capital now develops only destructive forces. It turns out that for Marx, in 1847, capital is destruction; he continued to hold this view.)

“... and connected with this a class is called forth, which has to bear all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages, which, ousted from society, is forced into the most decided antagonism to all other classes; a class which forms the majority of all members of society, and from which emanates the consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution, the communist consciousness, which may, of course, arise among the other classes too through the contemplation of the situation of this class.”<sup>3</sup>

The proletariat is the great hope of Marx and of the revolutionaries of his epoch. This is the class whose struggle for emancipation will liberate all humanity. Marx’s work is at once an analysis of the capitalist mode of production and of the proletariat’s role within it. This is why the theory of value and the theory of the proletariat are connected, though not directly:

“The above application of the Ricardian theory, that the entire social product belongs to the workers as **their** product, because they are the sole real producers, leads directly to communism. But, as Marx indicates too in the above-quoted passage, formally it is economically incorrect, for it is simply an application of morality to economics. According to the laws of bourgeois economics, the greatest part of the product does not belong to the workers who have produced it. If we now say: that is unjust, that ought not to be so, then that has nothing immediately to do with economics. We are merely saying that this economic fact is in contradiction to our sense of morality. Marx, therefore, never based his communist demands upon this, but upon the inevitable collapse of the capitalist mode of production which is daily taking place before our eyes to an ever greater degree...”<sup>4</sup>

Marx did not develop a philosophy of exploitation, as Bordiga often recalled. How will the capitalist mode of production be destroyed, and what does the “ruin” consist of? (Engels, in 1884, provided arguments for those who today speak of the decadence of capitalism.) This is not specified. After Marx the proletariat was retained as the class necessary for the final destruction, the definitive abolition of capitalism, and it was taken for granted that the proletariat would be forced to do this.

Bernstein grasped this aspect of Marx’s theory, and applied himself to demonstrating that there were no contradictions pushing toward dissolution.<sup>5</sup> But this led Bernstein to become an

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<sup>3</sup> Engels, Marx, *The German Ideology*, [ Moscow, 1964, p. 85. ]

<sup>4</sup> Engels, “Preface” to *The Poverty of Philosophy* by Marx, New York: 1963, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> See particularly “The Movement of Income in Modern Society” and “Crises and Possibilities of Adaptation” in

apologist for the old bourgeois society which capital was about to destroy, especially after 1913; consequently his work does not in any way clarify the present situation.

Marx left us material with which to overcome the theory of value, and also material necessary for overcoming the theory of the proletariat. The two theories are related, and justify each other. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx praises the capitalist mode of production, which he considers revolutionary. What is not stated explicitly is that the proletariat has this attribute to the extent that it carries out the internal laws of capitalism. The proletariat is present in the analysis. Marx postulates that the proletariat's misery will necessarily push it to revolt, to destroy the capitalist mode of production and thus to liberate whatever is progressive in this mode of production, namely the tendency to expand productive forces.

In *Capital* the proletariat is no longer treated as the class that represents the dissolution of society, as negation at work. The class in question here is the working class, a class which is more or less integrated in society, which is engaged in revolutionary reformism: struggle for wage increases, struggle against heavy work imposed on women and children, struggle for the shortening of the working day.

At the end of the first volume, Marx explains the dynamic which leads to the expropriation of the expropriators, to the increase of misery<sup>6</sup> which will force the proletariat to rise against capital.<sup>7</sup>

In the third volume, and also in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx does not describe a real discontinuity between capitalism and communism. Productive forces continue to grow. The discontinuity lies in the fact that the goal of production is inverted (after the revolution; i.e., the discontinuity is temporal). The goal ceases to be wealth, but human beings. However, if there is no real discontinuity between capitalism and communism, human beings must be wilfully transformed; how else could the goal be inverted? This is Marx's revolutionary reformism in its greatest amplitude. The dictatorship of the proletariat, the transitional phase (in the *Grundrisse* it is the capitalist mode of production that constitutes this transitional phase: this is obviously extremely relevant to the way we define communism today) is a period of reforms, the most important being the shortening of the working day and use of the labor voucher. What we should note here, though we cannot insist on it, is the connection between reformism and dictatorship.

The proletariat seems to be needed to guide the development of productive forces away from the pole of value toward the pole of humanity. It may happen that the proletariat is integrated by capital, but — and this is abused by various Marxists — crises destroy the proletariat's reserves and reinstate it into its revolutionary role. Then the insurrection against capital is possible again.

Thus Marx's work seems largely to be the authentic consciousness of the capitalist mode of production. The bourgeoisie, and the capitalists who followed, were able to express only a false consciousness with the help of their various theories. Furthermore, the capitalist mode of production has realized Marx's proletarian project. By remaining on a narrowly Marxist terrain, the proletariat and its theoreticians were outflanked by the followers of capital. Capital, having achieved real domination, ratifies the validity of Marx's work in its reduced form (as historical materialism). While German proletarians at the beginning of this century thought their actions

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*Presuppositions of Socialism and the tasks of Social Democracy*, Rowohlt Verlag, pp. 75ff.

<sup>6</sup> Here we should be careful, as Bordiga justly observed, not to reduce this to an economic concept.

<sup>7</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, New York: Random House, pp. 831–837.

were destroying the capitalist mode of production, they failed to see they were only trying to manage it themselves. False consciousness took hold of the proletariat.

Historical materialism is a glorification of the wandering in which humanity has been engaged for more than a century: growth of productive forces as the condition *sine-qua-non* for liberation. But by definition all quantitative growth takes place in the sphere of the indefinite, the false infinite. Who will measure the “size” of the productive forces to determine whether or not the great day has come? For Marx there was a double and contradictory movement: growth of productive forces and immiseration of proletarians; this was to lead to a revolutionary collision. Put differently, there was a contradiction between socialization of production and private appropriation.

The moment when the productive forces were to reach the level required for the transformation of the mode of production was to be the moment when the crisis of capitalism began. This crisis was to expose the narrowness of this mode of production and its inability to hold new productive forces, and thus make visible the antagonism between the productive forces and the capitalist forms of production. But capital has run away; it has absorbed crises and it has successfully provided a social reserve for the proletarians. Many have nothing left to do but to run on ahead: some say the productive forces are not developed enough, others say they have stopped growing. Both reduce the whole problem either to organizing the vanguard, the party, or resort to activities designed to raise consciousness.

Development in the context of wandering is development in the context of mystification. Marx considered mystification the result of a reversed relation: capital, the product of the worker’s activity, appears to be the creator. The mystification is rooted in real events; it is reality in process that mystifies. Something is mystified even through a struggle of the proletariat against capital; the generalized mystification is the triumph of capital. But if, as a consequence of its anthropomorphization, this reality produced by mystification is now the sole reality, then the question has to be put differently. 1) Since the mystification is stable and real, there is no point in waiting for a demystification which would only expose the truth of the previous situation. 2) Because of capital’s run-away, the mystification appears as reality, and thus the mystification is engulfed and rendered inoperative. We have the despotism of capital.

The assertion that the mystification is still operative would mean that human beings are able to engage in real relations and are continually mystified. In fact the mystification was operative once and became reality. It refers to a historical stage completed in the past. This does not eliminate the importance of understanding and studying it so as to understand the movement which leads to the present stage of the capitalist mode of production and to be aware of the real actors through the ages.

Both the mystifying-mystified reality as well as the previously mystified reality have to be destroyed. The mystification is only “visible” if one breaks (without illusions about the limitations of this break) with the representations of capital. Marx’s work is very important for this break. But it contains a major flaw: it fails to explain the whole magnitude of the mystification because it does not recognize the run-away of capital.

Earlier, revolution was possible as soon as the mystification was exposed; the revolutionary process was its destruction. Today the human being has been engulfed, not only in the determination of class where he was trapped for centuries, but as a biological being. It is a totality that has to be destroyed. Demystification is no longer enough. The revolt of human beings threatened in the immediacy of their daily lives goes beyond demystification. The problem is to create other

lives. This problem lies simultaneously outside the ancient discourse of the workers' movement and its old practice, and outside the critique which considers this movement a simple ideology (and considers the human being an ideological precipitate).

### 3. Repressive Consciousness

Mystification does not only affect capitalist society but also affects the theory of capitalism. Marxist theory elevated to the rank of proletarian consciousness is a new form of consciousness: repressive consciousness. We will describe some of its characteristics, leaving aside the problem of determining whether or not all forms of consciousness throughout history are repressive.

The object of repressive consciousness is the goal which it thinks it controls. Since there is a gap between this goal and immediate reality, this consciousness becomes theological and refines the differences between the minimum or immediate program and the maximum, future, or mediate program. But the longer the path to its realization, the more consciousness makes itself the goal and reifies itself in an organization which comes to incarnate the goal.

The project of this consciousness is to frame reality with its concept. This is the source of all the sophisms about the divergence between objective and subjective elements. It exists but it cannot be. And precisely because of its inability to be, it has to negate and scorn whatever is trying to emerge, to be.

In other words, it exists but it needs certain events to be real. Since it is a product of the past it is refuted by every current event. Thus it can only exist as a polemic with reality. It refutes everything. It can survive only by freezing, by becoming increasingly totalitarian. In order to operate it has to be organized: thus the mystique of the party, of councils, and of other coagulations of despotic consciousness.

All direct action which does not recognize this consciousness (and every political racket pretends to embody the true consciousness) is condemned by it. Condemnation is followed by justification: impatience of those who revolt, lack of maturity, provocation by the dominant class. The picture is completed by litanies on the petit-bourgeois character of the eternal anarchists and the utopianism of intellectuals or young people. Struggles are not real unless they revive class consciousness; some go so far as to wish for war, so that this consciousness will at last be produced.

Theory has turned into repressive consciousness. The proletariat has become a myth, not in terms of its existence, but in terms of its revolutionary role as the class which was to liberate all humanity and thus resolve all socio-economic contradictions. In reality it exists in all countries characterized by the formal domination of capital, where this proletariat still constitutes the majority of the population; in countries characterized by the real domination of capital one still finds a large number of men and women in conditions of 19<sup>th</sup> century proletarians. But the activity of every party and every group is organized around the myth. The myth is their source. Everything begins with the appearance of this class which is defined as the only revolutionary class in history, or at least as the most revolutionary. Whatever happened before is ordered as a function of the rise of this class, and earlier events are secondary in relation to those lived or created by the proletariat. It even defines conduct. Whoever is proletarian is saved; one who is not must expiate the defect of non-proletarian birth by various practices, going so far as to serve terms in factories. A group achieves revolutionary existence only at the moment when it is able to

exhibit one or several “authentic” proletarians. The presence of the man with calloused hands is the guarantee, the certificate of revolutionary authenticity. The content of the program defended by the group, its theory, even its actions, cease to be important; all that matters is the presence or absence of the “proletarian.” The myth maintains and revives the antagonism between intellectual and manual. Many councilists make a cult of anti-intellectualism which serves them as a substitute for theory and justification. They can pronounce any idiocy; they’ll be saved; they’re proletarians.

Just as it is thought by many that one who leaves the party thereby ceases to be revolutionary, so it is considered impossible to be revolutionary without claiming one’s proletarian position, without taking on the virtues thought to be proletarian. The counter-revolution ends at the mythical frontiers which separate the proletariat from the rest of the social body. Any action is justified in the name of the proletarian movement. One does not act because of a need to act, because of hatred for capital, but because the proletariat has to recover its class base. Action and thought are unveiled by intermediaries.

This is how, especially after 1945, the proletariat as revolutionary class outlived itself: through its myth.

A historical study of proletarian revolutionary movements would shed light on the limited character of this class. Marx himself clearly exposed its reformist character. Fundamentally, from 1848, when it demanded the right to work, to 1917–1923, when it demanded full employment and self-management by workers’ unions, the proletariat rebelled solely within the interior of the capitalist system. This seems to conflict with Marx’s statements in his “Critical Notes on the Article ‘The King of Prussia and Social Reform.’ By a Prussian”. But at this moment the proletariat really manifested itself as a class without reserves, as a total negation. It was forced to create a profound rupture which makes possible an understanding of what communist revolution and therefore communism can be.<sup>1</sup> Marx was right; but the capitalist mode of production, in order to survive, was forced to annihilate the negation which undermined it. The proletariat which is outside of society, as Marx and Engels say in *The German Ideology*, is increasingly integrated into society; it is integrated to the extent that it struggles for survival, for reinforcement; the more it organizes itself, the more it becomes reformist. It succeeds, with the German Socialist Party, in forming a counter-society which is finally absorbed by the society of capital, and the negating movement of the proletariat is over.<sup>2</sup>

Didn’t Kautsky, Bernstein and Lenin simply recognize the reality of the workers’ movement when they declared that it was necessary to unite it with the socialist movement: “The workers’ movement and socialism are in no way identical by nature” (Kautsky)?

Doesn’t Lenin’s discredited statement that the proletariat, left to itself, can only attain trade-union consciousness, describe the truth about the class bound to capital? It can be criticized only from the standpoint of the distinction, made by Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, between class as object of capital and class as subject. Without a revolutionary upheaval the proletariat cannot become a subject. The process through which it was to become a subject implied an outside, ex-

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<sup>1</sup> In the original Fredy Perlman translation the two sentences immediately before this, beginning ‘But at this moment (...)’, were shown as a quotation from Marx and a reference was given to an english translation of Marx’s text ‘The King of Prussia (etc.)’. Looking at the french text this is evidently an error based on a misprint and this sentence is actually by Camatte. Thanks to Antagonism for drawing attention to this.

<sup>2</sup> Which proves that it was impossible to hold on to a “classist” discourse and behavior while maintaining the basic “aclassist” thesis of the necessity of the proletariat’s self-negation.



ternal consciousness, which at a given moment would become incarnated in the proletariat. This consciousness coming from the outside is the most reified, the most estranged form of repressive consciousness! Consequently, the point is not to rehash the debate and return to Marx, but to recognize that the cycle of the proletarian class is now over, first of all because its goals have been realized, secondly because it is no longer the determinant in the global context. We have reached the end of the historical cycle during which humanity (especially the part situated in the West) moved within class societies. Capital has realized the negation of classes — by means of mystification, since it retains the conflicts and collisions which characterize the existence of classes. The reality is the despotism of capital. It is capital we must now face, not the past.

Almost all social democrats were aware of the divorce between the real, reformist movement of the working class and the socialist goal. Bernstein proclaimed that it was necessary to adapt once and for all, clearly and straightforwardly, not hypocritically (like the majority of the socialists) by making revolutionary proclamations in order to hide compromises.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, it became increasingly problematic to define and delimit the proletarian class. This problem became so acute that by the beginning of this century almost all revolutionaries were trying to define the proletariat in terms of consciousness: Luxemburg, Pannekoek directly, Lenin, Trotsky indirectly through the party, etc. The Russian revolution merely increased the urgency of specifying the proletarian class; this is the context of Korsch's attempts, and especially of Lukacs' *History and Class Consciousness*. Later on Bordiga held that the class should be defined in terms of the mode of production which it builds. Thus it can be a class for itself only from the moment when its actions move toward this goal, only to the extent that it recognizes its program (which describes this mode of production). For Bordiga, it exists when the party exists, because the program can only be carried by the party. "We still need an object, the party, to envision the communist society."<sup>4</sup> But to the extent that men and women are able to move on their own toward communism, as is evident among young people today, it becomes obvious that this object, the party, is not needed.

In sum, for party as well as council advocates, the problem of action would largely be reduced to finding a direct or indirect means for making the proletariat receptive to its own consciousness — since in this view the proletariat is itself only through its consciousness of itself.

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<sup>3</sup> On this subject, see the book by H. Mueller published in 1892, *Der Klassenkampf in der Deutschen Sozialdemokratie*, Verlags-kooperative Heidelberg-Frankfurt-Hanover-Berlin, 1969. This book clearly shows the duality-duplicity of men like Bebel, who expressed themselves as "rightists" in parliament and as "leftists" at workers' meetings, who told one audience it would be very long before the principles of socialism could be realized, while telling another that socialism was around the corner. This book is also interesting because it contains positions which were later to be taken up by the KAPD (German Communist Workers' Party).

<sup>4</sup> Bordiga at meeting in Milan, 1960.

## 4. Communism

Revolutionary reformism — the project of creating socialism on the foundation of capitalism and in continuity with the capitalist mode of production — disintegrated between 1913 and 1945. It is the end of what turned out to be an illusion: the illusion of being able to direct the development of the productive forces in a direction which differed from the one they had taken in reality. We can actually agree with Marx's view that after 1848 communism was possible precisely because the irruption of the capitalist mode of production had broken all social and natural barriers and made free development possible. But the mentality, the representations of people were such that they could neither conceive nor perceive such a future. They were too dependent on the millenarian movement of value, or they were too debilitated by the limitations of the perverted remains of their ancient communities, to be able to set out on a new path to reach another community. Even Marx and Engels ultimately considered capitalism a necessary moment, and thought that all human beings everywhere would inevitably come to experience it. Only the revolts of the Russian populists, and their desire to avoid the capitalist road, made Marx understand his error. But this recognition was insufficient. From the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the justification provided by Marxist theory (the theory of the proletariat), all humanity set out to wander: to develop productive forces.

If we can no longer accept Marx's theoretical analysis of the role of the productive forces, we can nevertheless agree with him after a detour. Capital enslaves humanity in the very name of humanity because it is anthropomorphized. This is nothing other than the reign of death. Human beings are dominated by their past being, while they contemplate it. It is a process which continually starts over again. Capital penetrates thought, consciousness, and thus destroys human beings such as they have been produced by centuries of class society. Their loss of substance is the loss of their former being, which capital has pumped out of them. Since this process is almost over, capital is now turning from its attack against the past dimension of humanity to an attack against its future dimension: it must now conquer imagination. The human being is thus despoiled and tends to be reduced to the biological dimension. The phenomenon reaches the roots. In other words, the development of productive forces appears to have been necessary

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<sup>1</sup> Absolute irreversibility is not a fact of history. Possibilities which appeared thousands or hundreds of years ago were not abolished for all time. History is not a Moloch which swallows possibilities, condemning the human future to an inevitable and irremediable despoliation. In that case history would be no more than a justification for what happened. Many would like to reduce history to this, making it the worst of despots.

Hegel's philosophy with its dialectic of supersession (*Aufhebung*), of movement which abolishes and preserves at one and the same time, was an attempt to salvage what human beings had produced in earlier epochs. Hegel was troubled by the problems of loss of reality, of the multiplicity of manifestations and possibles, etc. Thus he attached enormous importance to memory (see particularly the chapter "Absolute Knowledge," in the *Phenomenology of Mind*.)

By contrast, the movement of capital abolishes the memory of its previous stages (by mystification and magic) as well as the stages of humanity, and presents itself, as it is, at its highest level of development — the "reified" (or ossified) form" (See Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, [Moscow: 1971] , Vol. III, chapter on "Revenue and its Sources. Vulgar Political Economy."

for the destruction of old schemas, modes of thought, archaic representations which limited human beings (this destruction is now being analyzed by philosophers like Foucault). Threatened in their purely biological existence, human beings are beginning to rise against capital. It is at this point that everything can be re-conquered by generalized creation. But this becoming is not simple, unilinear. Capital can still profit from the creativity of human beings, regenerating and resubstantializing itself by plundering their imaginations. The importance and profundity of the struggle can be grasped in the face of the alternative: communism or destruction of the human species. And it should not be forgotten that during the wandering various revolutionary movements looked for an exit and various possibilities were blocked; they can now manifest themselves.<sup>1</sup>

We have to stop wandering and destroy the repressive consciousness which inhibits the emergence of communism. To do this we have to stop perceiving communism as a prolongation of the capitalist mode of production, and stop thinking it is enough to suppress exchange value and make use value triumphant. This dichotomy no longer signifies anything. Use value is tied to value even if it revolves around the principle of utility instead of productivity; related to the direct domination of human beings, it is inseparable from private property.

Communism is not a new mode of production<sup>2</sup>; it is the affirmation of a new community. It is a question of being, of life, if only because there is a fundamental displacement: from generated activity to the living being who produced it. Until now men and women have been alienated by this production. They will not gain mastery over production, but will create new relations among themselves which will determine an entirely different activity.

Nor is communism a new society.<sup>3</sup> Society grows out of the subjugation of some ethnic groups by others, or out of the formation of classes. Society is the network of social relations which quickly become despotic intermediaries. Man in society is man enslaved by society.

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of mode of production is in reality valid only for the capitalist mode of production, just as the concept of class is in reality operative only in bourgeois society. The concept of production in Marx's work is quite rich in attributes. It becomes impoverished when we move from the *1844 Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology* to *Capital*. It is closely related to the concept of nature and also to a certain conception of the human being. In other words, we have a much more complex "given" when we can examine it only in relation to the existence of initial communist communities and their dissolution. The separation of the human being from the community (*Gemeinwesen*) is a despoliation. The human being as worker has lost a mound of attributes which formed a whole when he was related to his community.

The process of expropriation of human beings is real. Those who do not understand this do not understand what capital is. Man has been reduced to an inexpressive being; he has lost his senses, and his activity has been reduced to quantified labor. Man turned into abstract being longs for music which still preserves the ancestral sensuality (thus the vogue of jazz and South American music). The reduced human being now has only one element relating him to the external world: sexuality which fills the void of the senses. It is precisely this which explains the pansexuality, or more exactly the pansexualization of being which Freud interpreted as an invariant characteristic of human beings, whereas it is the result of their mutilation. What is the subconscious if not the affective-sensual life of the human being repressed by capital? The human being has to be domesticated, shaped to a rationality which he must internalize — the rationality of the process of production of capital. Once this domestication is achieved, the human being is dispossessed of this repressed sensual life which becomes an object of knowledge, of science; it becomes capitalizable. The unconscious, becoming an object of commerce, is thinly sliced and retailed in the market of knowledge. The unconscious did not always exist, and it exists now only as a component in the discourse of capital; this is also true of human perversions.

Reduced to perfect inexpressivity, the human being increasingly becomes comparable point by point to the elementary particle studied by nuclear physics, where one can find the principles of the psychology of the capitalized human being who is moved by the field of capital.

<sup>3</sup> It is also unsound to speak of primitive society. We will substantiate this by making a new analysis of primitive

Communism puts an end to castes, classes and the division of labor (onto which was grafted the movement of value which in turn animates and exalts this division). Communism is first of all union. It is not domination of nature but reconciliation, and thus regeneration of nature: human beings no longer treat nature simply as an object for their development, as a useful thing, but as a subject (not in the philosophic sense) not separate from them if only because nature is in them. The naturalization of man and the humanization of nature (Marx) are realized; the dialectic of subject and object ends.

What follows is the destruction of urbanization and the formation of a multitude of communities distributed over the earth. This implies the suppression of monoculture, another form of division of labor, and a complete transformation of the transportation system: transportation will diminish considerably. Only a communal (communitarian) mode of life can allow the human being to rule his reproduction, to limit the (at present mad) growth of population without resorting to despicable practices (such as destroying men and women).

The domination of one group over another, the society of classes, originates in the sedentarization of the human being. We still live with the myths generated at the time of this fixation somewhere in our mother-earth: myths of the homeland, the foreigner; myths which limit the vision of the world, which mutilate. It is obvious that the reaction cannot be a return to a nomadism of a type practiced by our distant ancestors who were gatherers. Men and women will acquire a new mode of being beyond nomadism and sedentarism. Sedentary lives compounded by corporeal inactivity are the root cause of almost all the somatic and psychological illnesses of present-day human beings. An active and unfixed life will cure all these problems without medicine or psychiatry.

The passage to communism implies a transformation of technique. Technology is not a neutral thing; it is determined by the mode of production. In the West, more than elsewhere, the various modes of production increasingly separated human beings from technology, which was originally

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communities. If it is true that Marx's work does not deal adequately with the existence, development and dissolution of primitive communities, it is not true that Marx is absolutely wrong because of Europocentrism or the spirit of enlightenment, namely that his work suffers from the same shortcomings as bourgeois theory. The majority of those who hold this view have not understood the question of community in Marx's work and have reduced his work to a simple historical materialism.

What Marx's work lacks is a detailed analysis of the way "the economy" appears in primitive communities and provokes their disintegration.

We should add that it is becoming increasingly misleading to speak of capitalist society. We will return to this.

<sup>4</sup> In primitive communities human beings rule technology. Technology starts to become autonomous in ancient Western society, and this was feared by the ancients. Technology forces man to copy nature, even if later he can find a procedure not found in nature; thus he is subjected to a compulsory procedure, a how-to-do, a sort of natural order. He seems to lose the capacity to create freely. (On this subject, see the comments of J.P. Vernant in *Mythe et pensée chez les grecs*, Ed. Maspéro.) When human beings no longer fear technology, they simultaneously become reconciled with art, which had been disparaged at the end of slave society. This took place at the time of the Renaissance, when philosophers defined man as a being who makes himself (See Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*). But the development of technology did not lead man toward nature; on the contrary, it led to the expropriation of man and the destruction of nature. The human being increasingly loses the faculty of creativity. In this sense, the fear of the ancients was justified.

From the philosophers of the Renaissance, through Descartes and Hegel, to Marx, the human being is defined in relation to technology (man is a tool-maker: Franklin) and to production. To go beyond Marx, it is necessary to reexamine the "human phenomenon" from the disintegration of primitive communities until today and to rethink the works of philosophers and economists from Aristotle to Marx in order to understand more clearly how human beings perceived themselves in a period when value and then capital dominated, and in order to understand how, now that we have come to the end of the phenomenon value, we can conceive humanity, and thus communism.

no more than a modality of human being. The call for a convenient technology is a call for a technology which is again a prolongation of the human being and not an autonomous thing at the service of an oppressive being.<sup>4</sup>

Human beings in communism cannot be defined as simple users; this would be communism conceived as a terrestrial paradise where people dispose of what there is with such immediacy that human beings are indistinguishable from nature (man, as Hegel said in this context, would be an animal). Human beings are creators, producers, users. The entire process is reconstituted at a higher level, and for every individual. In relations between individuals, the other is no longer considered in terms of utility; behavior in terms of utility ends. The sexes are reconciled while retaining their differences; they lose the differences and rigid oppositions produced by millennia of antagonism.

These few characteristics should adequately clarify how the movement of ascent to the human community can be conceived.

We are all slaves of capital. Liberation begins with the refusal to perceive oneself in terms of the categories of capital, namely as proletarian, as member of the new middle class, as capitalist, etc. Thus we also stop perceiving the other — in his movement toward liberation — in terms of those same categories. At this point the movement of recognition of human beings can begin. This is obviously only the beginning of the liberation movement, and is continually threatened with failure. Refusing to take this into account denies the power of capital. What has to be perceived is a dynamic. We are slaves; our goal is not to become masters, even without slaves, but to abolish the entire dialectic of master and slave. This goal cannot be realized by the establishment of communities which, always isolated, are never an obstacle to capital, can easily be surrounded by capital, and are no more than deviations in relation to its norm (deviations which make that norm visible for what it is). Nor can the goal be reached by the cultivation of one's individual being, in which one would finally find the real human being. In reality these approaches should be connected. Perceiving oneself as a human being unshackled by any attributes already removes the dog collar imposed by class society. The desire for community is absolutely necessary. The reaffirmation of individuality (especially in its temporal aspect) is a rejection of domestication. But this is inadequate even as a first element of rebellion; the human being is an individuality and a *Gemeinwesen*. The reduction of the human being to his present inexpressive state could take place only because of the removal of *Gemeinwesen*, of the possibility for each individual to absorb the universal, to embrace the entirety of human relations within the entirety of time. The varied religions, philosophies and theories are mere substitutes for this essential component of human being. Since communism is the death of sameness, of repetition, human beings will emerge in all their diversity; *Gemeinwesen* will be affirmed by each. This implies that as of now we reject the despotism of a religion, a philosophy, a theory.

The refusal to be trapped by a theory is not a rejection of all theoretical reflection. It is just the opposite. But this refusal does postulate that the theoretical act is insufficient. Theory can call for the reconciliation of senses and brain but it remains within the boundaries of this separation. What must be affirmed is the whole of life, the entirety of its manifestations, the whole unified being. It may still be necessary to proceed with the help of Marx's insights, for example, but it becomes increasingly imbecile to proclaim oneself a Marxist. Furthermore, like repressive consciousness, theory can become a simple alibi for inaction. At the start, the refusal to act might be perfectly justifiable. Nevertheless, separation from reality often leads to failure to perceive new phenomena which shape it. At that point theory, instead of helping establish contact with reality,

becomes an agent of separation, of removal, and in the end is transformed into a protrusion, an ejection from the world. Waiting is particularly difficult for those who do not want to recognize that others can arrive at theory without us, our group, or our party as intermediaries. Theory, like consciousness, demands objectification to such an extent that even an individual who rejects political rackets can elevate theory to the status of a racket. In a subject posing as revolutionary, theory is a despotism: everyone should recognize this.

After the domination of the body by the mind for more than two millenia, it is obvious that theory is still a manifestation of this domination.

It is the whole of life that becomes determining. All the varied productions of the past — art, philosophy, science — are fragments. They are elements of the vast despoliation of human beings as well as attempts to remedy it. But the point is no longer to realize art or philosophy; capital has already done this in its way; the point is to conquer and create another world: a world where all the biological potentialities of the species can finally develop. In this vast movement, it is futile to want to present oneself as the repository of truth. First of all truth, like value, needs a measure, a standard, a general equivalent, a norm, hence a **State**. Secondly, truth is never more than one truth. The historical inflation of this concept parallels the ever more thorough destruction of human beings. Nothing less can be proposed than another life where the gestures, the words, the imaginations and all the feelings of human beings will no longer be chained, where senses and brain will unite — only this union can eliminate all the fixations of madness. It is obvious that all this can only be conquered by the destruction of the capitalist mode of production. It is all of humanity perceived through time that is hostile to capital. Human beings will have to undergo a profound revolutionization to be able to oppose capital; the actions of this movement are accompanied by the production of revolutionaries.

The emergence of revolution in all the domains of our lives leads some people to overemphasize the places where they felt this emergence.

Revolution does not emerge from one or another part of our being — from body, space or time. Our revolution as a project to reestablish community was necessary from the moment when ancient communities were destroyed. The reduction of communist revolution to an uprising which was to resolve the contradictions posed by the capitalist mode of production was pernicious. Revolution has to resolve all the old contradictions created by the class societies absorbed by capital, all the contradictions between relatively primitive communities and the movement of exchange value currently being absorbed by the movement of capital (in Asia and especially in Africa). Beyond this, the revolutionary movement is the revolution of nature, accession to thought, and mastery of being with the possibility of using the prefrontal centers of the brain which are thought to relate to the imagination. Revolution has a biological and therefore cosmic dimension, considering our universe limited (to the solar system); cosmic also in the meaning of the ancient philosophers and mystics. This means that revolution is not only the object of the passion of our epoch, but also that of millions of human beings, starting with our ancient ancestors who rebelled against the movement of exchange value which they saw as a fatality, passing through Marx and Bordiga who, in their dimension as prophets, witnessed this inextinguishable passion to found a new community, a human community. Wanting to situate the revolution is like wanting to fix its height. Saint-Just said that revolution could not stop until happiness was realized, thus showing the falsity of wanting to judge men in terms of the purely historical-material facts of a given epoch. The human being is never a pure being-there. He can only be by superseding and he cannot be only that which has to be superseded (Nietzsche). Structurally and biologically

man is a supersession because he is an overpowerful being. In other words, human beings are explorers of the possible and are not content with the immediately realizable, especially if it is imposed on them. They lose this passion, this thirst for creation — for what is the search for the possible if not invention? — when they are debased, estranged, cut off from their *Gemeinwesen* and therefore mutilated, reduced to simple individuals. It is only with the real domination of the capitalist mode of production that the human being is completely evacuated.

All the revolutions of the species are revolutions which try to go beyond the present moment, beyond what is permitted by the development of productive forces (Bordiga). This reach beyond the possible is what constitutes the continuity among the human generations, just as the perspective of communism conceived as the destruction of classes, exchange, and value constitutes the continuity among the varied revolutionaries; this is what, following Marx, we call the historical party.<sup>5</sup>

The struggle against reduction of the amplitude of the revolution is already a revolutionary struggle. The reader should not be astonished if to support this amplitude we refer to authors classically tagged religious, mystical, etc. What matters is the reappropriation of *Gemeinwesen* (and past beings are part of it), which can only be done after the unification of the species, and this unification can only be conceived by grasping the aspiration, desire, passion and will for community expressed through the ages. The human being can simultaneously be a *Gemeinwesen* only if humanity lives in community. As soon as fragmentation appears, the need to recompose a unity emerges. In the West this unity had a mediate and coercive form: the individual was defined by the State; knowledge was a means for hierarchization and for justification of the established order; the vicious circle of practice-theory emerged.

Communist revolution is complete revolution. Biological, sexual, social, economic revolutions are no more than partial attributes; the predominance of one is a mutilation of revolution, which can only be by being all.

Communist revolution can be conceived only if it is grasped through the history and paleontology of human beings as well as all other living beings. By grasping this we become aware that, if this revolution has long been necessary, it can now be realized. Earlier it was possible but not unavoidable. There were still other “human” paths in that they still allowed a human development; specifically, they allowed the externalization of human powers. Now almost everything has been externalized and plundered by capital, which describes the only path other than communist revolution: the total negation of human beings. Therefore we must understand our world; we must understand the despotism of capital and the movement of rebellion breaking out against it. This act of understanding which is taking place not only intellectually but also sensually (the rebellion is to a large extent bodily rebellion) can only be reached by rejecting the wandering and the repressive consciousness.

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<sup>5</sup> “Origine et fonction de la forme parti” (1961), published in *Invariance*, No. 1, Serie 1.

## **II. Decline of the Capitalist Mode of Production or Decline of Humanity?**



It has often been thought and written that communism would blossom after the destruction of the capitalist mode of production, which would be undermined by such contradictions that its end would be inevitable. But numerous events of this century have unfortunately brought other possibilities into view: the return to “barbarism,” as analyzed by R. Luxemburg and the entire left wing of the German workers’ movement, by Adorno and the Frankfurt School; the destruction of the human species, as is evident to each and all today; finally a state of stagnation in which the capitalist mode of production survives by adapting itself to a degenerated humanity which lacks the power to destroy it. In order to understand the failure of a future that was thought inevitable, we must take into account the domestication of human beings implemented by all class societies and mainly by capital, and we must analyze the autonomization of capital.

We do not intend to treat these historical deviations exhaustively in a few pages. By commenting on a passage in Marx’s *Grundrisse* we can show that it is possible to understand the autonomization of capital on the basis of Marx’s work, and we can also see the contradictions in Marxist thought and its inability to solve the problem. The passage is from the chapter on the process of circulation. To understand it, we should keep in mind what Marx had said shortly before this passage:

“Circulation time thus appears as a barrier to the productivity of labour = an increase in necessary labour time = a decrease in surplus labour time = a decrease in surplus value = an obstruction, a barrier to the self-realization process [*Selbstverwertungsprozess*] of capital.”<sup>6</sup>

Here Marx makes an extremely important digression:

“There appears here the universalizing tendency of capital, which distinguishes it from all previous stages of production and thus becomes the presupposition of a new mode of production, which is founded not on the development of the forces of production for the purpose of reproducing or at most expanding a given condition, but where the free, unobstructed, progressive and universal development of the forces of production is itself the presupposition of society and hence of its reproduction; where advance beyond the point of departure is the only presupposition.”<sup>7</sup>

What makes capital a barrier is not stated here, whereas its revolutionary, positive aspect is emphasized (this aspect is emphasized on many other pages of the *Grundrisse*, and of *Capital*): the tendency toward universal development of the forces of production. However, and this is what interests us here, capital cannot realize this; it will be the task of another, superior mode of production. The future of society here takes the form of an indefinite, cumulative movement.

“This tendency — which capital possesses, but which at the same time, since capital is a limited form of production, contradicts it and hence drives it towards dissolution — distinguishes capital from all earlier modes of production, and at the same time contains this element, that capital is posited as a mere point of transition.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, London: Pelican, 1973, p. 539.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 540.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Hence capital is driven towards dissolution by this contradiction. It is a pity that Marx did not here mention what he understands by “limited form of production,” since this keeps us from “seeing” clearly what he means by contradiction in this specific case. This conditions the understanding of the statement that the capitalist mode of production is a transitory form of production. Even without an explanation of the contradiction, we can understand it as follows: the capitalist mode of production is not eternal — Marx’s polemical argument against the bourgeois ideologues. This is the content of his main statements. But another argument is embedded in the preceding one: the capitalist mode of production is revolutionary and makes possible the passage to another, superior social form where human beings will no longer be dominated by the sphere of necessity (the sphere of the production of material life) and where alienation will cease to exist.

Today, after the blossoming of Marxism as a theory of development, another part of this sentence appears basic: there is a continuum between the two periods. What is a transition if not the opposite of a break? This continuum consists of the development of the forces of production. From which follows the shameful but real relationship: Marx-Lenin-Stalin! But this is not our topic. Our aim is to determine what constitutes the productive forces and for whom they exist, according to Marx in the *Grundrisse*.

“All previous forms of society — or, what is the same, of the forces of social production — foundered on the development of wealth.”<sup>9</sup>

Wealth resides in the productive forces and in the results of their action. There is a contradiction here which, according to Marx, characterizes the totality of human history: wealth is necessary and therefore sought, but it destroys societies. Societies must therefore oppose its development. This is not the case in the capitalist mode of production (it thus destroys all other social formations), which exalts the productive forces, but for whom?

“Those thinkers of antiquity who were possessed of consciousness therefore directly denounced wealth as the dissolution of the community [*Gemeinwesen*]. The feudal system, for its part, foundered on urban industry, trade, modern agriculture (even as a result of individual inventions like gunpowder and the printing press). With the development of wealth — and hence also new powers and expanded intercourse on the part of individuals — the economic conditions on which the community [*Gemeinwesen*] rested were dissolved, along with the political relations of the various constituents of the community which corresponded to those conditions: religion, in which it was viewed in idealized form (and both [religion and political relations] rested in turn on a given relation to nature, into which all productive force resolves itself); the character, outlook, etc. of the individuals. The **development of science alone** — i.e. the most solid form of wealth, both its product and its producer — was sufficient to dissolve these communities. But the **development of science**, this ideal and at the same time practical wealth, is only one aspect, one form in which the **development of the human productive forces**, i.e. of wealth, appears. Considered **ideally**, the dissolution of a given form of consciousness sufficed to kill a whole epoch. In reality, this barrier to consciousness corresponds to a **definite degree of development of the forces of material production** and hence of wealth. True, there

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

was not only a development on the old basis, but also a **development of this basis itself**.”<sup>10</sup>

For Marx, the productive forces are human (from the human being) and they are for the human being, for the individual. Science as a productive force (thus also wealth, as was already shown in the *1844 Manuscripts* and in *The German Ideology*) is determined by the development of these forces and corresponds to the appearance of a large number of externalizations, a greater possibility to appropriate nature. Even if it takes an ambiguous form, the blossoming of the human being is possible; it is the moment when, in the development of the dominant class, individuals can find a model of a fuller life. For Marx, the capitalist mode of production, by pushing the development of productive forces, makes possible a liberating autonomization of the individual. This is its most important revolutionary aspect.

“The highest development of this basis itself (the flower into which it transforms itself; but it is always this basis, this plant as flower; hence wilting after the flowering and as a consequence of the flowering) is the point at which it is itself worked out, developed, into the form in which it is compatible with the highest development of the forces of production, hence also the richest development of the individuals. As soon as this point is reached, the further development appears as decay, and the new development begins from a new basis.”<sup>11</sup>

There is decay because the development of individuals is blocked. It is not possible to use this sentence to support the theory of the decline of the capitalist mode of production<sup>12</sup> since it would have to be stated that the decline started, not at the beginning of this century, but minimally in the middle of the previous century; or else it would have to be shown that the decline of individuals is simultaneously the decline of capital, which contradicts what can be observed; Marx himself repeatedly explained that the development of capital was accompanied by the destruction of human beings and of nature.

When did the development of productive forces accompany the development of individuals in different societies? When was the capitalist mode of production revolutionary for itself and for human beings? Do the productive forces advance continually, in spite of moments when individuals decay? Marx said: “... the further development appears as decay...” Do the productive forces stagnate; does the capitalist mode of production decay?<sup>13</sup>

The remainder of Marx’s digression confirms that the decay refers to human beings. Individuals blossom when the productive forces allow them to develop, when the evolution of one parallels the evolution of the other. By means of a comparison with the pre-capitalist period, Marx shows that capital is not hostile to wealth but, on the contrary, takes up its production. Thus it takes up the development of productive forces. Previously the development of human beings, of their community, was opposed to the development of wealth; now there is something like symbiosis

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 540–541.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 541.

<sup>12</sup> As is done by Victor in *Révolution Internationale* No. 7, série 1, p. 4 of the article “Volontarisme et confusion.”

<sup>13</sup> Various authors have spoken of stagnation and declining production between the two world wars. Bordiga always rejected the theory of the decline of the capitalist mode of production as a gradualist deformation of Marx’s theory (see “Le renversement de la praxis dans la théorie marxiste,” in *Invariance* No. 4, série 1.

between them. For this to happen, a certain mutation was necessary: capital had to destroy the limited character of the individual; this is another aspect of its revolutionary character.

“We saw earlier that property in the conditions of production was posited as identical with a limited, definite form of the community [*Gemeinwesen*], hence of the individual with the characteristics — limited characteristics and limited development of his productive forces — required to form such a community [*Gemeinwesen*]. This presupposition was itself in turn the result of a limited historic stage of the development of the productive forces, of wealth as well as the mode of creating it. The purpose of the community [*Gemeinwesen*], of the individual — as well as the condition of production — is the reproduction of **these specific conditions of production** and of the individuals, both singly and in their social groupings and relations — as living carriers of these conditions. Capital posits the **production of wealth** itself and hence the universal development of the productive forces, the constant overthrow of its prevailing presuppositions, as the presupposition of its reproduction. Value excludes no use value; i.e. includes no particular kind of consumption etc., of intercourse etc. as absolute condition; and likewise every degree of the development of the social forces of production, of intercourse, of knowledge etc. appears to it only as a barrier which it strives to overpower.”<sup>14</sup>

This passage has momentous consequences. There is no reference to the proletariat; it is the revolutionary role of capital to overthrow the prevailing presuppositions. Marx had already said this, in a more striking manner:

“It is destructive towards all of this, and constantly revolutionizes it, tearing down all the barriers which hem in the development of the forces of production, the expansion of needs, the all-sided development of production, and the exploitation and exchange of natural and mental forces.”<sup>15</sup>

We are forced to take a new approach toward the manner in which Marx situated the proletarian class in the context of the continual upheaval carried out by the capitalist mode of production. What is immediately evident is that the capitalist mode of production is revolutionary in relation to the destruction of ancient social relations, and that the proletariat is defined as revolutionary in relation to capital. But it is at this point that the problem begins: capitalism is revolutionary because it develops the productive forces; the proletariat cannot be revolutionary if, after its revolution, it develops or allows a different development of the productive forces. How can we tangibly distinguish the revolutionary role of one from that of the other? How can we justify the destruction of the capitalist mode of production by the proletariat? This cannot be done in a narrowly economic context. Marx never faced this problem because he was absolutely certain that the proletarians would rise against capital. But we have to confront this problem if we are going to emerge from the impasse created by our acceptance of the theory according to which the production relations come into conflict with the development of the productive forces (forces which were postulated to exist for the human being, since if this were not the case, why would human

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<sup>14</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 541.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 410.

beings rebel?) If the productive forces do not exist for human beings but for capital, and if they conflict with production relations, then this means that these relations do not provide the proper structure to the capitalist mode of production, and therefore there can be revolution which is not for human beings (for example, the general phenomenon which is called fascism). Consequently capital escapes. In the passage we are examining, Marx makes a remarkable statement about the domination of capital:

“Its own presupposition — value — is posited as product, not as a loftier presupposition hovering over production.”<sup>16</sup>

Capital dominates value. Since labor is the substance of value, it follows that capital dominates human beings. Marx refers only indirectly to the presupposition which is also a product: wage labor, namely the existence of a labor force which makes valorization possible:

“The barrier to **capital** is that this entire development proceeds in a contradictory way, and that the working-out of the productive forces, of general wealth etc., knowledge etc., appears in such a way that the working individual **alienates** himself [*sich entausst*]; relates to the conditions brought out of him by his labor as those not of his **own** but of an **alien wealth** and of his own poverty.”<sup>17</sup>

How can this be a limit for capital? One might suppose that under-consumption by the workers causes crises, and the final crisis. This is one possibility; at least it appears that way at certain times. Marx always refused to ground a theory of crises on this point, but this did not keep him from mentioning this under-consumption. For Marx capital has a barrier because it despoils the working individual. We should keep in mind that he is arguing against apologists for capital and wants to show that the capitalist mode of production is not eternal and does not achieve human emancipation. Yet in the course of his analysis he points to the possibility for capital to escape from human conditions. We perceive that it is not the productive forces that become autonomous, but capital, since at a given moment the productive forces become “a barrier which it strives to overpower.” This takes place as follows: the productive forces are no longer productive forces of human beings but of capital; they are for capital.<sup>18</sup>

The despoliation (alienation) of the working individual cannot be a barrier for capital, unless Marx means barrier in the sense of a weakness; such a weakness would make capitalism inferior to other modes of production, particularly if we contrast this weakness to the enormous development of productive forces which it impels. In Marx’s work there is an ambiguity about the subject to which the productive forces refer: are they for the human being or for capital? This ambiguity grounds two interpretations of Marx. The ethical interpretation (see especially Rubel) emphasizes the extent to which Marx denounces the destruction of the human being by capital, and vigorously insists that the capitalist mode of production can only be a transitory stage. The interpretation of Althusser and his school holds that Marx does not succeed in eliminating

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 541.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> This is what Marx shows when he analyzes fixed capital in the *Grundrisse*, and also in Book I of *Capital* “where he analyzes the transformation of the work process into a process of production of capital (see also *Un chapitre inédit du Capital*, Paris: Ed. 10/18, 1971).

the human being from his economic analyses, which reflects his inability to abandon ideological discourse, from which follows Althusser's problem of correctly locating the epistemological break.

It is possible to get out of this ambiguity. If capital succeeds in overcoming this barrier, it achieves full autonomy. This is why Marx postulates that capital must abolish itself; this abolition follows from the fact that it cannot develop the productive forces for human beings while it makes possible a universal, varied development which can only be realized by a superior mode of production. This contains a contradiction: capital escapes from the grasp of human beings, but it must perish because it cannot develop human productive forces. This also contradicts Marx's analysis of the destruction of human beings by capital. How can destroyed human beings rebel? We can, if we avoid these contradictions, consider Marx a prophet of the decline of capital, but then we will not be able to understand his work or the present situation. The end of Marx's digression clarifies these contradictions.

"But this antithetical form is itself fleeting, and produces the real conditions of its own suspension. The result is: the tendentially and potentially general development of the forces of production — of wealth as such — as a basis; likewise, the universality of intercourse, hence the world market as a basis. The basis as the possibility of the universal development of the individual, and the real development of the individuals from this basis as a constant suspension of its **barrier**, which is recognized as a barrier, not taken for a **sacred limit**. Not an ideal or imagined universality of the individual, but the universality of his real and ideal relations. Hence also the grasping of his own history as a **process**, and the recognition of nature (equally present as practical power over nature) as his real body. The process of development itself posited and known as the presupposition of the same. For this, however, necessary above all that the full development of the forces of production has become the **condition of production**; and not that specific **conditions of production** are posited as a limit to the development of the productive forces."<sup>19</sup>

If this process is to concern individuals, capital has to be destroyed and the productive forces have to be for human beings. In the article, "La KAPD et le mouvement prolétarien,"<sup>20</sup> we referred to this passage to indicate that the human being is a possibility, giving a foundation to the statement: the revolution must be human. This is in no way a discourse on the human being conceived as invariant in every attribute, a conception which would merely be a restatement of the immutability of human nature. But we have to point out that this is still insufficient, since the development of productive forces which, according to Marx, will take place in a superior mode of production, is precisely the same development presently carried out by capital. The limit of Marx is that he conceived communism as a new mode of production where productive forces blossom. These forces are undoubtedly important, but their existence at a certain level does not adequately define communism.

For Marx, capital overcomes its contradictions by engulfing them and by mystifying reality. It can only apparently overcome its narrow base, its limited nature which resides in the exchange of capital-money against labor force. Capital must inevitably come into conflict with this presup-

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<sup>19</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp. 541–542.

<sup>20</sup> *Invariance*, Série II, No. 1.

position; thus Marx speaks of the opposition between private appropriation and socialization of production. Private appropriation of what? Of surplus value, which presupposes the proletarian, and thus the wage relation. But the entire development of capital (and Marx's own explanations are a precious aid in understanding it) makes the mystification effective, making capital independent of human beings, thus enabling it to avoid the conflict with its presupposition. One might say that the conflict nevertheless persists, as a result of the total process: socialization. This is true. But the socialization of production and of human activity, the universal development of the productive forces and thus the destruction of the limited character of the human being — all this was only a **possible** ground for communism; it did not pose communism automatically. Furthermore, the action of capital tends constantly to destroy communism, or at least to inhibit its emergence and realization. To transform this possible ground into reality, human intervention is necessary. But Marx himself showed that capitalist production integrates the proletariat. How could the destruction of human beings and of nature fail to have repercussions on the ability of human beings to resist capital and, *a fortiori*, to rebel?

Some will think we are attributing to Marx a position which is convenient to us. We will cite an extraordinary passage:

“What precisely distinguishes capital from the master-servant relation is that the **worker** confronts [capital] as consumer and possessor of exchange values, and that in the form of the **possessor of money**, in the form of money he becomes a simple center of circulation — one of its infinitely many centers, in which his specificity as worker is extinguished.”<sup>21</sup>

One of the modalities of the re-absorption of the revolutionary power of the proletariat has been to perfect its character as consumer, thus catching it in the mesh of capital. The proletariat ceases to be the class that negates; after the formation of the working class it dissolves into the social body. Marx anticipates the poets of the “consumer society” and, as in other instances, he explains a phenomenon which is observed only later and then falsely, if only in terms of the name given to it.

The preceding observations do not lead to a fatalistic conception (this time negative), such as: whatever we do, there's no way out; it's too late; or any other mindless defeatism which would generate a sickening patch-work reformism. First we have to draw the lesson. Capital has run away from human and natural barriers; human beings have been domesticated: this is their decadence. The revolutionary solution cannot be found in the context of a dialectic of productive forces where the individual would be an element of the contradiction. Present day scientific analyses of capital proclaim a complete disregard for human beings who, for some, are nothing but a residue without consistency. This means that the discourse of science is the discourse of capital, or that science is possible only after the destruction of human beings; it is a discourse on the pathology of the human being. Thus it is insane to ground the hope of liberation on science. The position is all the more insane where, as with Althusser, it cannot make its own break, liquidate its “archeology,” since it remains faithful to a proletariat — a proletariat which in this conception is merely an object of capital, an element of the structure. But this inefficient, destroyed human being is the individual produced by class societies. And on this we agree: the human being is dead. The only possibility for another human being to appear is our struggle

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<sup>21</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp. 420–421.

against our domestication, our emergence from it. Humanism and scientism (and the followers of “ethical science” *à la* Monod are the most absolute slaves of capital) are two expressions of the domestication of humanity. All those who nurse the illusion of the decadence of capital revive ancient humanist conceptions or give birth to new scientific myths. They remain impermeable to the revolutionary phenomenon running through our world.

Until now all sides have argued as if human beings remained unchanged in different class societies and under the domination of capital. This is why the role of the social context was emphasized (man, who was fundamentally good, was seen to be modified positively or negatively by the social context) by the materialist philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, while Marxists emphasized the role of an environment conditioned by the development of productive forces. Change was not denied, and after Marx it was repeated that history was a continual transformation of human nature. Nevertheless it was held explicitly or implicitly that an irreducible element continued to allow human beings to revolt against the oppression of capital. And capitalism itself was described in a Manichean manner: on one side the positive pole, the proletariat, the liberating class; on the other the negative pole, capital. Capital was affirmed as necessary and as having revolutionized the life of human beings, but it was described as an absolute evil in relation to the good, the proletariat. The phenomenon which emerges today does not in the least destroy the negative evaluation of capital, but forces us to generalize it to the class which was once antagonistic to it and carried within itself all the positive elements of human development and today of humanity itself. This phenomenon is the recomposition of a community and of human beings by capital, reflecting human community like a mirror. The theory of the looking glass could only arise when the human being became a tautology, a reflection of capital. Within the world of the despotism of capital (this is how society appears as of today), neither a good nor an evil can be distinguished. Everything can be condemned. Negating forces can only arise outside of capital. Since capital has absorbed all the old contradictions, the revolutionary movement has to reject the entire product of the development of class societies. This is the crux of its struggle against domestication, against the decadence of the human species. This is the essential moment of the process of formation of revolutionaries, absolutely necessary for the production of revolution.

Jacques Camatte May, 1973



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